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Men of the Bible

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

THEIR LIVES AND TIMES

BY

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FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Publishers of Evangelical Literature

PREFACE.

THE lives of Ezra and Nehemiah are known to us, almost wholly, from the Books that bear their names. A few notices in Josephus, a few Rabbinical traditions, are all that can be added to the accounts given in Holy Scripture. Their times, however, receive considerable illustration from recent researches into the ancient history of Persia. Such copiously illustrated works as Ker Porter's "Travels," Rich's "Babylon and Persepolis," Baron Texier's "Description de l'Arménie, de la Perse, et de la Mésopotamie," and the "Voyage en Perse" of MM. Flandin and Coste, throw a flood of light on the character of the Persian Court, the magnificence of the Royal palaces, and the manners and customs of the governing classes under the early Persian kings. Loftus's "Chaldæa and Susiana" contains a special monograph on the great Persian capital, Susa, which accurately describes its situation, and its probable appearance in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra. The notices in classical authors, as Herodotus, Ctesias, Xenophon, Arrian, Athenæus, add occasional touches, and help towards a reproduction of the scenes in which were passed the early lives of the two great Reformers. Josephus adds very little to the information contained in Scripture, and the Rabbinical traditions are neither copious, nor wholly trustworthy. In this deficiency of ancient authorities, modern writers demand an unusual share of our attention. The articles on "Ezra" and "Nehemiah" in Winer's "Realwörterbuch," in Kitto's "Cyclopædia," and in Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," are of great weight and importance. But, probably, the best accounts that have hitherto been given of the times and characters of the two Reformers are those contained in the general "Histories of Israel" put

forth within the last twenty or thirty years by some of the ripest scholars and the most eminent writers of our day. Ewald in his "Geschichte des Volkes Israel," and Dean Stanley in his "Lectures on the Jewish Church," have made most careful studies of the period, and it is to them that the present writer must acknowledge his special obligations. The work of Professor Kuenen on the "Religion of Israel" has also been of considerable service to him, though its value is much impaired by the confident adoption of quite unproved and most improbable hypotheses with respect to the late origin of the Mosaic Law, and the promulgation of much of it by Ezra and Nehemiah "for the first time." On the subject of the chronology of the period, the author has found himself unable to adopt the view advocated with so much ingenuity by the late Mr. Bosanquet in his "Times of Ezra and Nehemiah," or even that suggested in the "Dictionary of the Bible" by Bishop Arthur Hervey. The old chronology of Prideaux has seemed to him the most reasonable, and it has confirmed his judgment on the point to find the same view taken both by Ewald and Stanley.

LONDON,
November 21, 1890.

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EZRA.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND EDUCATION.

Ezra's priestly descent—His position in the priestly order—Culture with which he was brought into contact—Babylonian culture of the time—Judæan culture—Ezra's leanings towards the latter—His probable studies.

EZRA was of the tribe of Levi, and of the priestly branch of it, which was descended from Aaron. He came of the line of the High Priests, but not of the branch which had enjoyed the High Priesthood since the return from the Captivity. The last high priestly ancestor whom he could boast was Seraiah (Ezra vii. 1), who held the office in Zadekiah's time (2 Kings xxv. 18), was captured at the final siege of Jerusalem, and was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar (ibid. ver. 21). This personage was probably his great-great-grandfather.[1] There is reason to believe that the priestly houses were held in high respect among their countrymen during the whole period of the exile; and that such as elected to remain behind when Cyrus gave permission for the Return, continued to form the directing and governing element among the flourishing communities of Jews which were scattered over the eastern countries, more especially in Babylonia, Persia, and Media. Thus Ezra, as belonging to a high-priestly family, would from the first have held a dignified position among the exiles, and, as he grew to manhood among them, would have had every opportunity to cultivate his mind, and lay up stores of knowledge, that the circumstances of the time allowed. His position in the priestly order would be above that of most, since

[1] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 408.

there could be few with so illustrious an ancestry—an ancestry of which he was justly proud (Ezra vii. 1–5)—and whatever forms of culture belonged to the Judæans of the period, whatever "schools" were open to them, whatever access they had either to native or to foreign literature, would come within the range of his choice.[1] It is difficult to say, what exactly was the culture, either of the Judæan or of the Babylonian schools of the time; but some attempt must be made—however scanty are the materials—to estimate each, if any definite idea is to be formed of the means at Ezra's disposal for equipping himself to perform his task in life.

Now the learning of the Babylonians had, from a very ancient date, covered a wide field. They had cultivated arithmetic, astronomy, history, chronology, geography, comparative philology, and grammar. In astronomy the progress which they had made was remarkable. They had mapped out the heaven into constellations, traced the passage of the sun and moon along the line of the Zodiac, catalogued the fixed stars, observed, calculated, and recorded eclipses, noted occultations of the planets by the sun and moon, determined correctly within a small fraction the synodic revolutions of the moon, and the true length of the solar year, ascribed eclipses of the sun to their proper cause, noticed comets, fixed the periodic times of the planetary revolutions, and thence correctly determined their relative distance from the earth.[2] They had, it is true, mixed astrology with their astronomy, and thus degraded the "queen of sciences" from the exalted position properly belonging to her; but still "a school of pure astronomers existed among them,"[3] and it was a veritable science which the Greeks of the days of Alexander the Great received at their hands. It was a science built up inductively from observation and experience, resting upon ancient records, and, in the main, truthful and sound. It formed a solid basis for the further researches of Hipparchus and Ptolemy. It lies, in many respects, at the root of the astronomy of to-day. It had, of course, the defects naturally belonging to a geocentric system; but, in spite of these defects, it had no small value,

[1] Compare Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 130, E. T.; Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 115.

[2] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. ii. pp. 571–577.

[3] Ibid. p. 578.

both as a mental training, and as available for many practical purposes.

Astronomical investigations cannot be conducted without a knowledge of arithmetical processes; and there is evidence that Babylonian learning included a considerable proficiency in the science of number. Not only were the simpler processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division known to them, but they formed tables of squares and cubes,[1] and extracted square and cube roots. Two systems of arithmetical notation were employed by them, the one decimal, the other sexagesimal. In calculations of time, they counted by the *sar*, the *ner*, and the *soss*—the *soss* being a period of sixty, the *ner* one of six hundred, and the *sar* one of three thousand six hundred (60×60) years. But for ordinary calculations they had a decimal system, and a notation much resembling that of the Romans.

Babylonian history and chronology were very closely interconnected, the Babylonians priding themselves on being most exact and particular in their dates. The names of kings and the duration of reigns were carefully chronicled; and calculations of the distance of time between one event of history and another were regarded as capable of being made with absolute accuracy.[2] Events, however, were recorded in a very dry and jejune manner, while the investigation of causes, and the philosophy of history generally, met with complete neglect. Kings were usually their own historiographers, and directed what events of their reigns should be put on record, and what passed over *sub silentio*. Candour was no characteristic of the historical writings, which rarely mentioned the failure of an enterprise, and never chronicled a defeat. A minute exactness, however, was affected with respect to details, and in the accounts of a king's buildings, of his expeditions, of the plunder that he took, of the tribute that was paid him, of the punishments which he inflicted, all the facts were given *in extenso*, and nothing left to the imagination.[3]

Geography, with the Babylonians, was practical rather than speculative. It did not concern itself with the shape or size of the earth, the general distribution of land and water, the height of mountains, the length of rivers, or the contour of coasts. It was, in the main, an enumeration of countries, with occasional

[1] G. Smith, "History of Babylonia," p. 19.
[2] Ibid. p. 91.
[3] See the "Records of the Past," vols. i., iii., v., vii., ix., xi., *passim*.

mention of their relative geographical position, and with marked reference to their principal products.[1] Only two seas were known, the "Upper Sea," or Mediterranean, and the "Lower Sea," or Persian Gulf. The rivers noticed were the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Greater Zab, the Lesser Zab, the Eulæus, the Khabur, and the Orontes. The principal known countries were Elam, Chaldæa, Babylonia, Persia, Media, Assyria, Armenia, or Ararat, Mesopotamia, or the Naïri country, Cilicia, Lydia, Commagene, Syria, Phœnicia, Palestine, Arabia, the Sinaitic peninsula, Egypt, and Ethiopia. The mountain ranges which received notice were those of Zagros, Niphates, Masius, Amanus, and Lebanon. The only islands known were Cyprus, Aradus, and the Bahrein isles in the Persian Gulf. Distances were estimated by *kaspu* (parasangs or *farsakhs*) and double *kaspu* (*kaspu-kikkar*)—the former about three miles and a half, the latter about seven miles, English.[2] There is no indication, however, of any use of maps or plans by the Babylonians, nor any proof that they even made exact measurements of the distance between place and place, much less anticipated the modern system of accurate survey by means of triangulation.

The study of comparative philology and grammar was forced on the Babylonians by the linguistic changes of which their country was the theatre. Originally, the inhabitants of the lower Mesopotamian region spoke an agglutinative language of a Turanian type.[3] This language—the Akkadian or Accadian—gradually died out, and was succeeded by a form of the Semitic, not very different from Hebrew. The old Akkadian after a while became unintelligible, except to scholars; and as the whole of the ancient learning—the accumulation of centuries—was written in it, careful study and exact translation became absolutely necessary, unless the living and coming generations were to lose all benefit from the times that were past. Hence the energy of a large number of persons was turned in this direction; and the result was a whole library of works, consisting in part of direct translations of the old Akkadian documents into the new Babylonian language—in part, of syllabaries, vocabularies, and lists of various kinds, where the ancient forms of speech were represented in one column, and their modern

[1] "Records of the Past," vol. xi. pp. 147–149.
[2] So Oppert in the "Records of the Past," vol. xi. p. 19.
[3] Sayce in G. Smith's "History of Babylonia," p. 67.

equivalents in another. A labour of this kind could not but result in a considerable advance in linguistic and grammatical science, by the formation of canons of construction, the observance of different shades of meaning in words, and the establishment of approximate synonyms. The litterati of Babylon in the time of Ezra were, in all probability, possessed of something more than a rudimentary criticism ; and their translations and paraphrases were well calculated to serve as models for less advanced nations.

On the other hand, the Hebrew exiles had also inherited from their forefathers, and brought with them into Babylonia from Palestine, a literary culture which was far from contemptible. From the time of the sojourn in Egypt, if not even earlier, Israel had been a literary people ;[1] and sacred writings, regarded as possessing the highest value, and entitled to the utmost respect, had been among their most cherished treasures. "Schools" had early been formed, into which bodies of students were collected under the direction of a master, and in which writing, composition, religious doctrine, and music were taught. "The chief subject of study was, no doubt, the Law and its interpretation ;"[2] but "subsidiary subjects of instruction"[3] entered also into the curriculum, and among these were certainly included musical science, sacred poetry, exegesis, and a rough criticism. As time went on, the number of sacred books increased, and also the number of other books, not regarded as sacred, but nevertheless viewed as authentic, and of high value. The prophetical schools were the keepers of these books, and in some instances, probably, their compilers and arrangers. By the time of the Exile, or, at any rate, by the time of Ezra, there existed, not only the historical works of the Pentateuch, of Joshua, and Judges, of Samuel and of Kings, but a vast amount of poetical writings, partly of a gnomic character, partly in the shape of psalms and hymns, partly in that of the collected writings of particular prophets, as Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, Amos, Joel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the rest of those commonly known as "the Major and Minor Prophets ;"[4] whose works are still extant. There were also a number of compositions, well

[1] Exod. xvii. 14, xxiv. 4 ; Deut. xxxi. 22–26.

[2] "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 930. [3] Ibid.

[4] Malachi is perhaps to be excepted, since that prophet seems to have lived later than Ezra (Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 170, note).

known to the writers of the time of the Captivity, which have since been wholly lost; as those quoted by the author of Chronicles—"the Chronicle of King David" (1 Chron. xxvii. 24), "the Acts of Samuel the Seer," "the Acts of Nathan the Prophet," "the Acts of Gad the Seer" (ibid. xxix. 29), "the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite," "the Visions of Iddo the Seer" (2 Chron. ix. 29), "the Acts of Shemaiah the Prophet," "Iddo the Seer on Genealogies" (ibid. xii. 15), "the Commentary of the Prophet Iddo" (ibid. xiii. 22), "the Acts of Jehu the son of Hanani" (ibid. xx. 34), "the Commentary of the Book of the Kings" (ibid. xxiv. 27), "Isaiah's Acts of Uzziah" (ibid. xxvi. 22), "the Vision of Isaiah" (ibid. xxxii. 32), and "the Acts of Hosai," or "of the Seers" (ibid. xxxiii. 19). Whether the "Thousand Songs of Solomon," and his works upon natural history (1 Kings iv. 32, 33), were extant then, or not, may be doubted; but it is beyond question that the exiles were in possession of a copious literature, varied in its character, and of high educational value to those who studied it.

Such being the condition of learning and literature during the time when Ezra was growing to manhood, we have further to inquire, what was the probable course and line of his own studies and acquirements. And here it seems necessary at once to note the strong religious bias of his mind and character. Ezra, though not a member of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets," had all the religious fervour of a prophet, and all the disregard of mere profane and secular learning which characterized the prophets generally. His heart was wholly set on the moral and religious improvement of his countrymen. The bulk of the Babylonian learning would, consequently, possess little attraction for him. He would devote himself especially to the pursuit and cultivation of that science and literature which had been handed down in the Judæan schools, and which since the Exile had no doubt derived considerable advantage and improvement from contact with the "Chaldæan learning," and with the "famous scientific caste"[1] which had one of its chief seats at Babylon, and another at Borsippa, in the immediate neighbourhood. His main study would be a study of the sacred books, and especially of the Torah or "Law of Moses"—the most sacred of all the Judæan documents, of his deep regard for which we have ample proof (Ezra vii. 6, 10;

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 115.

x. 3; Neh. viii. 2, 5, 14; ix. 3, 14; x. 29, &c.). But this would involve much linguistic and critical research, since the Old Hebrew was no longer generally intelligible to the exiles, whose language had come to be the Aramaic, or so-called "Chaldee." Ezra would have to make himself thoroughly acquainted with two considerably different forms of speech, and able without hesitation or pause to translate the one into the other (Neh. viii. 8). He would also have to master the elements, at any rate, of textual criticism, in order to decide between various readings in the different copies of the Law, which were in the hands of the exiles. Either it was from the first, or it soon came to be, his object to make himself as perfect a "scribe of the Law of God" (Ezra vii. 12, 21) as possible; and this involved not only acquaintance with the letter, but familiarity with the spirit, of Scripture—the power of expounding [1] aright all the many passages of the Law where the meaning was obscure or ambiguous, and so making the hearer to "understand" it (Neh. viii. 7). Essential elements in his education would thus be—(1) Knowledge of two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic; (2) Facility in speaking and writing them; (3) Deep acquaintance with the full spiritual meaning of the Law, so as to correctly expound it; (4) Some knowledge of textual criticism, either in its principles, or in the traditional application of them.

But this was not all that was needed. To be the successful teacher of a people, which was what Ezra set himself and "prepared his heart" to be,[2] it is necessary to know them; and to know them, it is necessary to study their history. If Ezra was, as he almost certainly was,[3] the author of Chronicles, he must clearly have made the history of his nation, from its earliest beginning, one of the principal objects of his study. The writer of Chronicles has searched the archives of his nation with extraordinary diligence, and has gathered his narrative from original documents, and the works of contemporary writers, with an indefatigable industry and a zeal above all praise. We cannot doubt that Ezra, in the course of his early training at Babylon, must have devoted a large share of his attention to the Judæan historical literature, of which an

[1] Josephus calls the scribes ἐξηγητὰς νόμων ("Ant. Jud.," xvii. 6, § 2)

[2] Ezra vii. 10: "To teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

[3] See below, ch. vi.

account has been given above,[1] which had been brought with them from Jerusalem by some of the richer and better-educated among the exiles, and had been treasured up by them as among the most valuable of their possessions. He may indeed have carried on these studies, and so reached the perfection to which he ultimately attained in later life; but the foundation, whereon was afterwards built up so lofty a superstructure, may be presumed to have been laid, and much of the material afterwards employed to have been accumulated, in those early years when leisure was abundant, and the acquisition of knowledge was the main duty of the day. It is deeply to be regretted that so little has come down to us with respect to the Judæan schools of the period of the Exile,[2] the division of the subjects of study, the methods of the teaching, or the order in which the subjects were taken. The very names of the teachers anterior to Ezra are unknown to us, and we are precluded from drawing any picture of the "Gamaliel" at whose feet he was brought up; we can only figure to ourselves vaguely a docile and zealous student, diligent in his attendance day after day on the best teachers of the time, listening to them, and hanging on their words, poring over the books to which they allowed him access, questioning them and pondering their replies, and so at once improving his mind,

"And hiving wisdom with each studious year."

The scribe could not enter upon his office until he was thirty years of age.[3] His studies began, probably, at thirteen; in which case he would be under tutelage and instruction for the space of seventeen years. Education was thus not hurried over as it so often is; and Ezra would have ample space to equip himself with all the knowledge his profession required before the time came for engaging in its active exercise.

[1] See page 6.

[2] Compare Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 131.

[3] So Schöttgen concludes ("Horæ Hebraicæ"), but rather from the analogy of the Levite's office than from any direct proof.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY RELATIONS WITH THE PERSIAN GOVERNMENT.

Position of the Jews under the Persians—Favour shown to them by Cyrus—Grounds of this favour—Its results—Re-occupation of Judæa under Zerubbabel—Continuance of Jewish communities in Persia—Ezra's position—His birth under Darius Hystaspis—Grows to manhood under Xerxes—Character of Xerxes—His edict for the extermination of the Jews—General alarm caused thereby—His second edict and its consequences—Ezra's probable feelings towards Xerxes—Death of Xerxes.

THE position which Ezra occupied politically was, primarily, that of a Persian subject. The supremacy exercised by Babylon over the Jewish nation from the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 586) to the destruction of the Babylonian Empire by Cyrus the Great (B.C. 538), passed on the capture of Babylon in that year to Persia, and the Achæmenian monarchs thenceforward for above two centuries controlled and directed the destinies of the Hebrew people. They inaugurated their rule by an act of extraordinary grace and favour. The people was found by them split into two great sections. On the one hand, there were still in Judæa Proper, in the central region of Palestine, in Galilee, and even in the district beyond the Jordan, "many descendants of Israel who remained true to their religion,"[1] and lived peaceably, intermixed with heathens, in the old settlements of the nation; on the other hand, there dwelt in Babylon and its vicinity the great mass of the people, and especially the noblest and most distinguished of them,

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 90.

descendants of that *élite* of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem which Nebuchadnezzar, in his various raids upon the land, had carried off (2 Kings xxiv. 14–16; xxv. 11, 12). Cyrus had no sooner made himself master of Babylon than, in the very first year of his reign there, he issued a decree, whereby this entire population, amounting to many tens of thousands, and possessed of considerable wealth,[1] was permitted, and exhorted, to quit the land into which it had been forcibly transplanted some fifty, sixty, or seventy years earlier, and to transfer itself once more to its old and much-loved habitation (2 Chron. xxxvi. 23; Ezra i. 3).

It is an interesting inquiry, what were the grounds of the remarkable and exceptional favour thus shown by the great Persian conqueror, the foremost man of his day, to the Judæan people? Ewald indeed suggests that, "as the mighty destroyer of the Babylonian Empire, Cyrus was called, without being stimulated by others, to bring freedom and restoration to *all* the peoples it had oppressed, and *all* the cities it had overthrown."[2] But history records no other instance of such favour as having been shown by Cyrus to any other people; nor, indeed, is the mission of restoration and reversal of the doings of the power which he succeeds any part of the ordinary conception formed of his duties by an Oriental conqueror. In general the *status quo* is maintained; the achievements of the conquered power are regarded as *faits accomplis;* the victor reaps the benefit of them, and has no thought of undertaking so quixotic a task as that of giving back to freedom and independence the nationalities which his predecessor has brought under subjection. There must have been some very special reason which induced Cyrus to depart from the ordinary course of proceeding among kings and rulers of the period, and at the same time to make an exception from his own usual practice, by the restoration of Israel.

The explanation of this abnormal act is probably to be found in the recognition by Cyrus of a certain resemblance and conformity between his own religion and that of the Israelites—a resemblance and conformity which caused him to feel a keen sympathy with the people and a strong desire to help and benefit them. The nearness of Zoroastrianism to the ancient

[1] Josephus, "Ant. Jud.," xi. 1.

[2] Ewald, vol. v. pp. 49, 50.

Jewish faith is generally allowed ;[1] and, though it is now held by some that Cyrus was not a Zoroastrian,[2] yet the grounds for this opinion are in reality insufficient, and historical criticism will, it is probable, ultimately revert to the belief which was almost universal before the discovery of the well-known "Cyrus Tablet." The decree in Ezra (ch. i. 2, 3), considered merely as a historical document, is likely to be quite as authentic as the Babylonian clay tablet, which was not issued by Cyrus himself, but by the priests of Bel-Merodach, who would be interested in misrepresenting him. And the Behistun Inscription shows us the Zoroastrian religion as established in Persia, certainly under Cambyses,[3] and therefore probably under Cyrus, not as first set up by Darius Hystaspis. We are not perhaps entitled to regard the decree as exactly expressing the views of Cyrus on the subject of religion; its language is probably "coloured by the Hebrew medium through which it has passed;"[4] but at any rate we are justified in accepting it as the best extant authority on "the guiding cause of the liberation,"[5] and the nearest approach that we can obtain to what was passing in the Great King's mind. He was actuated by a religious motive; he sympathized with the Jews as monotheists; he identified their God, Jehovah, with his own God, Ormazd; and he considered the restoration of the Jewish Temple as a religious duty. It is even quite within the bounds of possibility that the narrative of Josephus[6] is true; and that the action of Cyrus was mainly determined by his having, on becoming master of Babylon, been brought into contact with the Jews who had held high office under his predecessor, and been by them made acquainted with those prophecies of Isaiah, which announced his victories, and declared him to be "God's shepherd, who should perform all his pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. xliv. 28). The theory of a "second Isaiah" or

[1] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. ii. pp. 324–340, and compare Haug, "Essays on the Sacred Writings of the Parsees," p. 257, and Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. pp. 39, 40.

[2] Sayce, "Herodotos," p. 440.

[3] "Beh. Inscr.," col. i. par. 14; compare the Scythic, or Protomedic, text.

[4] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 82. [5] Ibid.

[6] "Ant. Jud.," xi. 1.

"Great Unnamed," who lived during the time of the Captivity, however fanciful, does not invalidate this view, since the effect on the mind of Cyrus would scarcely be less if the prophecies were recent than if they were two centuries old; and it might even be argued that the more recent they were, the greater the obligation under which they would have laid him. In any case, if we accept as true the high political position assigned to Daniel in the book that bears his name, under the three reigns of Belshazzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian (Dan. i. 21; v. 11–29; vi. 2–28), it would be natural that the attention of Cyrus should be called to any mention of his name in the Jewish sacred books which was of a flattering and laudatory character.

The permission given by Cyrus for the return of the Jews, and indeed of the whole people of Israel (Ezra i. 21; ii. 70; vi. 16), to their own land, was not at first accepted by any very large number. No more than 42,360 Israelites, together with 7,337 slaves, quitted Babylonia under the appointed leader, Sheshbazzar, or Zerubbabel, and accomplished the long and painful journey from the Chaldean capital to the Judæan territory (ibid. ii. 64, 65; compare Neh. vii. 66, and 1 Esdr. v. 41). By far the greater number, and especially those of the wealthier classes,[1] preferred to remain behind, to hold the property which they had acquired, and pursue the avocations to which they were accustomed on a foreign but now friendly soil. It has been calculated that those who returned stood to those who stayed behind in the proportion of one to six;[2] but, however this may have been, it is quite certain that the edict of Cyrus took but a very partial effect, and that, both at Babylon and elsewhere in the Persian dominions, as especially at Susa (Esther ix. 5–18), there remained, during the whole of the Persian period, very large and flourishing communities of Jews, who, as a general rule, were content with their position, and made no effort to remove to Palestine. It was to one of these communities, probably that of Babylon, that Ezra belonged. The Persian government, for the most part, treated them well. Most probably a special quarter was assigned to them in each of the principal towns wherein they dwelt, and an independent

[1] Josephus, "Ant. Jud.," xi. 1.
[2] Bullock, in Smith's "Dict. of the Bible," vol. i. p. 441.

municipal organization may have been granted them in many if not in all, instances. They enjoyed certainly the free exercise of their religion. Synagogues everywhere grew up, and in many places schools of learning were founded, which attained a high reputation. A certain connection was kept up with Jerusalem; and from the time of the complete restoration of the Temple (B.C. 515), an annual payment was made by each foreign Jew towards the Temple service,[1] which was collected in the provinces, and carried each year by sacred messengers to Jerusalem.[2] The Jewish communities formed, thus far, a sort of *imperium in imperio;* but still their individual members had all the duties of Persian subjects to discharge, were taxed like the other subject races, and might be called upon to serve in the wars. With the burdens of citizenship they shared also its privileges. High places were opened to them; and thus we find Zerubbabel and Nehemiah designated as "Pashas," or provincial governors, and Mordecai declared to have been "next to the king" (Esther x. 3).

No statement has come down to us with respect to the exact year of Ezra's birth. We may gather, however, from the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus in Ezra vii., that in B.C. 458—that monarch's seventh year—he was at least forty years of age.[3] If so, he must have been born under Darius, the son of Hystaspes—the great ruler in whose reign the Second Temple was brought to its completion (Ezra vi. 15), and to whom the organization of the Persian Empire was due.[4] Darius was very friendly to the Jews (ibid. vers. 1–12), and is likely to have favoured those of Babylon especially, since in the native Babylonians he had implacable enemies, who twice rebelled against him, and set up pretenders, who disputed with him the sovereignty of the Eastern world.[5] But Darius died in B.C. 486, when Ezra was probably still a boy attending school, and was then succeeded by his son Xerxes, the arbitrary tyrant,

[1] "Mishna," *Shekalim*, vii. 4; Joseph., "Ant. Jud.," xvi. 6, § 1.

[2] Philo, "Leg. ad Caium," p. 1013.

[3] Thirty was probably the age for entering upon the scribe's office (see above, p. 8). Ezra must have been a scribe for a considerable term of years before he could have gained the reputation which caused Artaxerxes and his seven counsellors to single him out for an important mission (Ezra vii. 14).

[4] Herod. iii. 89-97.

[5] "Beh. Inscr." col. i. par. 18, 19, col. iii. par. 13, 14.

whose caprices and extravagances are so well known. Ezra grew to manhood under this licentious and sanguinary prince, the worst of all the Archæmenian monarchs, and the most fickle and capricious even of Oriental rulers. He was probably about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age when the news came to Babylon from Susa[1] that, to gratify a favourite, the fantastic Xerxes had issued a decree for the extermination of the whole Jewish people (Esther iii. 12, 13). Then "in every province"—and certainly not least in the adjacent province of Babylonia—"was there great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (ibid. iv. 3). The doom of death, pronounced against the whole race, would be carried by the swift posts, which Darius had established throughout the empire, in a very short space, to the remotest Jewish settlement within the Persian dominions, not only to Babylon and Borsippa, and Ahava, and Nearda, but to Mespila, and Rhages, and Damascus, and Jerusalem, and Lachish, and Hebron, and Beersheba. Everywhere the Jews would be thrown into consternation. There would seem to be no way of escape. An irresponsible despot, utterly reckless of bloodshed, well known to have committed the wildest extravagances in the earlier years of his reign,[2] had condemned the entire nation to death, and sealed his condemnation by a decree—a decree which even he, with all his pride and self-will, was powerless to revoke (ibid. viii. 8). Ezra, and his fellow-countrymen in Babylon, must have fully shared with the rest of the nation in their extreme alarm and apprehension, and while seeking to avert their doom by fasting and self-humiliation, must have been roused to bitter hatred of the monarch who threatened their lives.

This state of apprehension lasted for somewhat more than two months. Then, a little before midsummer, the posts went once more speeding through the land, bearing a royal message (Esther viii. 10). "King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) granted permission to the Jews, in every city wherein they had a settlement, to gather themselves together on the day for which the massacre was fixed, and to stand for their lives, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that should assault them, and to have their spoil for a prey" (ibid. ver. 11). The former decree could not be directly

[1] In B.C. 474, Xerxes' 12th year. [2] Herod. vii. 35, 39, &c.

countermanded; and so, to defeat it, the Jews were allowed and encouraged to resist in arms any attack that might be made upon them by the native races among whom they dwelt, and assured of the neutrality—the benevolent neutrality—of the royal forces. At once there was a revulsion of feeling. The Jews were confident of their own strength, if they might freely use it, unhampered by the fear of being taxed with rebellion, and punished by the central authority for insurrection. So, everywhere, "in every province and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast, and a good day" (ibid. ver. 17). The sackcloth was put off; the mourning came to an end; feasting superseded fasting; "joy and gladness" took the place of sorrow and apprehension. At Babylon, no doubt, as elsewhere, a violent re-action set in; and Ezra and his companions, released from their alarms, gave themselves up to rejoicing and festivity.

But the crisis was not yet past. The day fixed by the former decree would not arrive until the spring of the ensuing year. Between eight and nine months would have to pass before it could be seen and known whether the Jews or their enemies would prevail, whether God's people would triumph or be swept away. After the first burst of joy on the arrival of the second decree a certain amount of apprehension must have revived. The Jews had many bitter enemies among the various peoples subject to the Persian Crown. Their pride of race and haughty exclusiveness made them disliked generally. When Jerusalem was about to fall under the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, it was probably not among the Edomites alone that the cry was raised of "Down with her, down with her, even to the ground" (Psa. cxxxvii. 7, Prayer-Book Version). The malevolence of their foes had been excited by the first decree, and, as time went on, it became quite clear to the Jews settled in foreign towns that on the day named in the decree—the 13th of Adar[1]—they would be attacked. Accordingly they prepared themselves, procured arms, "gathered themselves together" (Esther ix. 2, 16), perhaps organized themselves into corps, at any rate watched and stood upon their guard, keeping a wary eye upon their foes. The attitude of the government was favourable. "All the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and the

[1] Early in March, B.C. 473.

officers of the king"—each in his several station—"helped the Jews" (ibid. ver. 3), not, it is probable, openly taking their part, but secretly aiding them, granting them facilities, and putting impediments in the way of their foes. At last the day, so long looked for, arrived, and the collision took place. We have no details of the circumstances of the struggle in any place but Susa.[1] There, on the 13th of Adar, the Jews of the place assembled, and being menaced, fell upon their enemies, and "smote them with the edge of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto them" (ibid. ver. 5), slaying as many as five hundred (ver. 6). Nay, further, not content with their triumph, they asked and obtained the royal permission to continue the struggle for another day, and in the course of the second day slew of their enemies three hundred more, making a total of eight hundred. Among the killed were the ten sons of Haman, their great persecutor (ibid. vers. 7–15). Elsewhere, "in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus," the Jews also "gathered themselves together, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt" (ibid. ver. 2), and "stood for their lives, and slew of their foes," in all, "seventy and five thousand"[2] (ibid. ver. 16). Among the towns wherein these sanguinary scenes were enacted, Babylon is likely to have held a leading place.

Thus Ezra, by the time that he was twenty-five years old, had probably passed through some severe trials and had some remarkable experiences. He was not a mere recluse student. The circumstances of his life had made him acquainted with danger, trouble, doubt, suspense, conflict, triumph. When, at thirty, he was formally inducted into the scribe's office, he was no neophyte, trembling, nervous, and diffident, but a man of ripened judgment and tried powers, competent to fill well an important position, and to exercise a powerful influence over the fortunes of his countrymen. He cannot have been, during the lifetime of Xerxes, a very loyal Persian subject. The remembrance of the fearful danger into which his nation had been

[1] Ewald suggests that there was no conflict, and indeed no danger, anywhere but at Susa ("History of Israel," vol. v. p. 231). Such a view is, however, in direct contradiction to Esther ix. 2, 16, as well as to Josephus, "Ant. Jud," xi. 6, § 13.

[2] The Septuagint Version has "fifteen thousand," which is perhaps a more probable number.

thrust by the weakness and folly of the reigning king could not have been obliterated, and is scarcely likely to have been condoned, in consideration of the half-repentance and half-retraction which the influence of Esther and Mordecai brought about. Ezra, and the Jews generally, may have been pleased and gratified by the high place accorded to their compatriots at the Court of Susa (Esther ix. 29, 32 ; x. 2, 3) ; but they could never cease to detest the cruel king, who, with a barbarity beyond that even of Antiochus Epiphanes in later times (1 Macc. iii. 35, 36), had doomed their whole race to extinction. While Xerxes lived they cannot have felt secure against a recurrence of the danger to which they had been exposed, and which they had, by a series of wonderful chances, escaped. Xerxes died in B.C. 465, murdered by the captain of his guards. Ezra was at this time, probably, between thirty and thirty-five years of age.

CHAPTER III.

RELATIONS WITH ARTAXERXES LONGIMANUS.

Troubles in Persia at the death of Xerxes—Accession of his son, Artaxerxes—Revolt of Egypt, and resolve of Artaxerxes to strengthen the Jewish element in the population of Palestine—The new colonists drawn chiefly from Babylonia—Choice of Ezra as leader—Commission intrusted to him—Fewness of the colonists—Wealth intrusted to them—Powers conferred on Ezra—His reason for not asking an escort—His care to carry sufficient credentials—Exact terms of his commission.

THE crown of Persia passed, on the death of Xerxes, after a certain period of disturbance, to the youngest of his sons, Artaxerxes, whom the Greeks called "Macrocheir" and the Romans "Longimanus." He was not much more than a boy at his accession, and had some difficulty in maintaining himself upon the throne; but, after seven months of indecision, he adopted a vigorous policy, punished Artabanus, the murderer of his father, and his tool, Aspamitres, with death, and undertook the active direction of the state. After suppressing a revolt in Bactria, in which he gained some military distinction, his attention was turned, in the fifth year of his reign, towards Egypt, where an insurrection had broken out under Inarus, an African chief, and Amyrtæus, a native Egyptian, which threatened the gravest danger to the empire, since it was fomented by the Athenians.[1] It may well have been in connection with this most important rebellion, which was not suppressed till six years later, that the Great Monarch took into special consideration the condition of Palestine, which lay upon the Egyptian

[1] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. iii. pp. 470–473, 2nd edition.

border; and, regarding the Judæans as the most faithful of all his subjects in that quarter, resolved to attach them as closely as possible to his interests by favours which should recall the old kindness and the old munificence of Cyrus and of Darius Hystaspis.[1] The colonists who had gone out with Zerubbabel were, he knew, too few and too feeble to occupy one half of the territory which had belonged to the Jewish nation in the olden time; Jerusalem itself was but sparsely populated (Neh. vii. 4), and the people maintained with difficulty its position among the hostile tribes which encompassed it. Under these circumstances Artaxerxes determined on a re-colonization. He resolved to renew the permission which had been given, eighty years earlier, by Cyrus, and to make a decree that "all they of the people of Israel in all his realm, and of their priests and Levites, which were minded to go up to Jerusalem," should be at liberty to do so (Ezra. vii. 13). He expected probably from this initiative a greater result than actually followed it. He desired to have in the extreme limit of South-Western Asia, an effective garrison, which should hold the country for him against all comers; furnish him with a *point d'appui* from which he might make his attacks on the revolted Egyptians; and, if the worst came to the worst, and Egypt re-established her independence, should form a solid barrier against any advance into Asia which might be attempted by the ambitious Africans.

But who was to lead out the colony, and from what quarter were the new settlers to be obtained? There is reason to believe that, of all the Jewish communities dispersed over foreign lands, that of Babylon was at the time at once the most numerous and the wealthiest. Without limiting his invitation —which was conceived in the broadest terms—to the inhabitants of a single city, it was natural that the Persian monarch should look especially to the place where Judæans were congregated in the greatest numbers, to be the starting-point, and the main source of supply, of the new migration. He would know Babylon well, since it had been, from an early date, the custom of the Achæmenian kings to hold their court, during different portions of the year, at the three great capitals of Babylon, Susa, and Ecbatana. According to the best authority,[2] the Babylonian residence was the longest, extending to seven

[1] Compare Ezra i. 1–11; iii. 7; vi. 6–14.

[2] Xenophon ("Cyrop." viii. 6, § 22).

months out of the twelve. Artaxerxes, during these frequent and prolonged sojourns, must have acquired an intimate knowledge of the great Chaldæan city, of the mixed character of its population, and of the proportion in which the different ethnic elements stood to each other.

He may also have become personally acquainted with a certain number of the leading Judæans, the men of most repute among their fellow-countrymen in the Babylonian community. As Xerxes had had "Mordecai the Jew" among his intimates at Susa, and as this same Artaxerxes at a later date was familiar with Nehemiah, another Jew, at the same place (Neh. i. 11; ii. 1–8), so in his earlier residences at Babylon Longimanus may have known something of Ezra, if not personally, yet at any rate by reputation. Or, possibly, it was not until the king had formed his project of reinforcing the Israelites in Judæa by a second colony, that he began to inquire for a man of influence among the Jews of Babylon, competent to carry out his idea. The terms of his decree seem, however, to imply something like a close personal knowledge. Ezra is described as "the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect" (Ezra vii. 12). "The law of his God is in his hand" (ibid. ver. 14), and "the wisdom of his God" (ibid. ver. 25). He is trusted to an almost unlimited extent. He is addressed in the second person (vers. 14–25). It is possible that the decree, as reported by the writer of Ezra, may not be an exact translation of the original Persian document; but there can be little doubt that it fairly represents that document's tone and spirit.[1] Ezra had clearly, in some way or other, gained the deep respect and high approval of the Persian king, who must have formed an extraordinary estimate of his character and capacity. Personal knowledge best explains this high estimate, and is quite conceivable under the circumstances.

The exact mission entrusted to Ezra is now to be considered. In the first place, he was to collect colonists. No compulsion was to be used. This was not like one of the occasions when a despotic Oriental king ordered the transference of a subject population from one part of his empire to another, for the purpose of punishing their offences, or breaking their spirit, or

[1] Ewald says, "We have every reason to believe this Aramaic document, at least in its essential contents, as genuinely historical" ("Hist. of Israel," vol. v. p. 136, note).

quenching their patriotic ardour. It was of its essence, that it should be voluntary. The king wanted, not a mere increase of population in the Judæan territory, but the gathering together into that region of a band of stanch adherents, who would stoutly maintain the interests of the Persian Crown in the south-western corner of Asia and resist all encroachment. Ezra was, no doubt, bidden to collect as many as he could; but he had great difficulties to contend with, and the entire number of colonists with which he set out from Babylon does not appear to have exceeded six thousand.[1] The Judæan settlers in Babylonia were attached to the homes which they had made for themselves. They had trades, employments, businesses, which they could not carry away with them. To the generality expatriation meant impoverishment, the loss of position, the disruption of ties, the extinction of the old life, and its replacement by a new life to be begun under trying and difficult circumstances. It is apparent that the community which had gone out under Zerubbabel, notwithstanding the patronage which it had received from the two greatest of the Achæmenian monarchs, Cyrus and Darius Hystaspis, had not greatly flourished, was not in a truly prosperous state, nay, rather was overwhelmed with debt and suffering (Neh. v. 2–5), lay, in fact, in a weak and depressed condition, and so offered no temptation to intending immigrants. Dean Stanley's picture of the Judæan community at this period is not overdrawn: "The poorer classes," he observes, "had, many of them, sunk into a state of serfage to the richer nobles, in whom the luxurious and insolent practices of the old aristocracy, denounced by the earlier prophets, began to reappear. Jerusalem itself was thinly inhabited, and seemed to have stopped short in the career which, under the first settlers, had been opening before it. If we could trust the conjecture of Ewald that the eighty-ninth Psalm expresses the hope of a Davidicking in the person of Zerubbabel and his children, and the extinction of that hope in the troubles of the time, we should have a momentary vision of the shadows which closed round the reviving city. It is certain that, whether from the original weakness of the rising settlement, or from some fresh inroad of the surrounding tribes, of which we have no distinct notice, the walls of Jerusalem were still unfinished;

[1] Fifteen hundred adult males (Ezra viii. 3–14). Allowing four to a family, the total number would be six thousand.

huge gaps left in them where the gates had been burnt and not repaired; the sides of its rocky hills cumbered with their ruins; the Temple, though completed, still with its furniture scanty and its ornaments inadequate."[1] Thus, it was very far from a tempting prospect that was presented to the Babylonian Israelite, who was asked to exchange the comfortable quarters, where he and his fathers had been settled more than a hundred and thirty years, for residence in a distant land, exposed to many dangers, and in a community weak, depressed, and impoverished.

Again, there were the perils and hardships of the journey to be considered. Either the waterless desert must be crossed by way of Tadmor and Damascus, or the long *détour* must be made by the Euphrates valley, the chalky upland near Aleppo, and the Cœle-Syrian vale; with the certainty, in either case, of great fatigue, and the probability of attack from robber tribes,[2] fierce and cruel, and amenable to no government, who would cut off all stragglers from the caravan and carry them into hopeless slavery. Such a prospect would deter many, and strongly reinforce the other arguments which inclined the Jews of the Dispersion to remain where they were, and turn a deaf ear to the persuasions which Ezra addressed to them.

The result was, as we have said, that only about six thousand souls, men, women, and children included, obeyed his call and set out with him from Babylon. These souls belonged to some twelve families, chiefly families which had taken part in the colonization under Zerubbabel, and which therefore might expect to find friends and helpers in the Judæan territory. One descendant of David accompanied the emigrants, a man of the name of Hattush (Ezra viii. 2). There were also, besides Ezra, two priests, Gershom and Daniel. The remainder were of families possessing but little distinction. The largest contingent sent by any family was three hundred adult males, or twelve hundred colonists; the smallest twenty-eight adult males, or a hundred and twelve of both sexes and all ages. One family, that of Adonikam, distinguished itself by joining the emigration with all its remaining members; but the number was insignificant, amounting to no more than two hundred and forty (Ezra viii. 13).

[1] "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 114.

[2] Ezra viii. 22; Neh. ii. 9.

Next in importance to the number of colonists was the amount of wealth that they could bring with them. They were about to join a poverty-stricken community, or at any rate one in which opulence was rare, and the great majority was not merely possessed of narrow means, but crushed under the burden of indebtedness.[1] Artaxerxes took this state of things into his consideration, and made provision against it. He and his chief counsellors and his lords made a contribution in gold and silver to a large amount, and intrusted it to Ezra for conveyance to Jerusalem, where it was to be laid out in the adornment of the Temple, and other cognate uses (Ezra vii. 15, 27 ; viii. 25). Further, they sanctioned and promoted a subscription among the non-Jewish inhabitants of the empire for the benefit of the Jews (ibid. vii. 16), following in this the example of Cyrus, who had done the same for those who went up with Zerubbabel (ibid. i. 4). Artaxerxes likewise presented to the Temple a number of vessels, some of gold, some of silver, some of "fine copper" or brass[2] (ibid. viii. 26, 27)—twenty basins of the first, each worth fifty darics, or about fifty-five pounds sterling ; a hundred vessels of the second, each weighing a talent ; and two vessels of the third, which was a rare amalgam at the time and regarded as highly valuable. He also conferred on Ezra a most important power—namely, the right of drawing upon the provincial treasuries in Palestine and Syria for any further sums or any stores that he might need, within the limit, however, of a hundred talents of silver, and a hundred measures, respectively, of wheat, wine, and oil (ibid. ver. 22). At the same time he granted an exemption from taxes of every sort or kind to all Jewish priests and Levites, to the Nethinim, or sacred slaves given to the Levites to assist them in their work, and even to the "ministers," or lowest class of persons employed in the Temple service (ibid. ver. 24). Ezra was thus enabled to convey to his countrymen in Judæa a most important supply of the precious metals. The contribution in specie amounted to as much as six hundred and fifty talents of silver, or nearly twice the amount received annually by the Persian Crown from the entire Syrian satrapy, which included within it, not only Syria, but Phœnicia, Palestine, and Cyprus ; together with one

[1] See above, p. 21.

[2] See the comment on Ezra viii. 27 in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol iii. p. 413.

hundred talents of gold, which was probably worth at least four times the amount of the silver (ibid. ver. 26).

The powers conferred by Artaxerxes upon Ezra were extraordinary. He was sent, primarily, "to inquire" (Ezra vii. 14), *i.e.*, to make inquisition into the general condition of the province, and report upon it; according to an ordinary practice of the Persian Court, by which commissioners were despatched, either regularly or irregularly, from head-quarters, to inspect particular provinces and bring the Crown an account of them.[1] But this was only a small part of his mission. Though he is not expressly given anywhere the title of governor—"Pechah" or "Tirshatha"—yet it is quite clear that he exercised the full governmental office, and was, during this his first visit to Jerusalem, entirely uncontrolled by any higher authority. He was distinctly empowered by the terms of his commission to set up magistrates and judges over all the people—*i.e.*, all the Israelite people — in the district beyond the river — the "province" (*mĕdĭnah*), as it was called, in a special sense; and it is evident that he was practically himself the Chief Judge (Ezra ix. 1; x. 5, 10, 11, 16, 17). He had the power of life and death (ibid. vii. 26), though it does not appear that he exercised it; and he had, *of course*, what such power implies, the right to inflict all the customary punishments of a secondary kind, as fine, imprisonment, entire confiscation of goods, and outlawry.[2] It was especially enjoined upon him by the king, that he should see to the observance among all classes in Judæa of "the law of his God" (ibid. vii. 14, 25, 26)—that he should enforce it upon those who knew it, and teach it to such as were ignorant of it. He was to regard "the law of his God" as being, in the territory committed to his charge, also "the law of the king" (ibid. ver. 26), and was not to condone its neglect or non-observance, but to punish all offenders against it rigorously. Special stress was laid upon the complete re-establishment, in full dignity and honour, of the Temple service (ibid. vers. 15–20) with its daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly sacrifices, its meat-offerings and drink-offerings (ibid. ver. 17), and its *entourage* of priests, Levites, singers, porters, Nethinim, and "ministers," each in their several stations bearing their part in

[1] Xen., "Cyrop." viii. 6, § 16.

[2] Our version has "banishment" (Ezra vii. 26); but "cutting off from the congregation" is probably intended.

the service, and helping forward the due celebration of it (ibid. ver. 24). The house itself was to be "beautified" (ibid. ver. 27), the number of the vessels increased, and all things that were needful for it provided (ibid. ver. 20). Artaxerxes seems to have set great store upon the intercession which the Jews were wont to make in their public services on behalf of their civil governor, whoever he might be (Jer. xxix. 6), and was fearful lest, through any default in the regular series of offerings, there "should be wrath against the realm of the king, and of his sons" (ibid. ver. 23). He clearly identified Jehovah, the God of the Jews with his God, Ormazd; and Ezra believed that it was Jehovah who had "put in his heart" all the good intentions which he entertained towards the Jewish people (Ezra viii. 27).

Ezra did not fail to recognize that the commission entrusted to him by the Persian king involved not only responsibility, but a considerable amount of difficulty and danger.[1] The thought crossed his mind to call the king's attention to the perils of the way, and to beg that such an escort of soldiers, both horse and foot, might be ordered to accompany himself and his fellow emigrants, as would afford them adequate protection if an attack were made (Ezra viii. 22). But, on consideration, he put aside the idea. In previous consultations with the king he had expressed a full assurance in the power and will of Jehovah to protect His faithful worshippers from all dangers, and to pour His wrath and fury upon all who might oppose them. After having thus expressed himself he felt ashamed to confess to any apprehension or alarm in respect of the coming journey, and therefore, as Ewald says,[2] "refrained from asking for a royal escort for the caravan, although this precaution was quite customary at the time on account of risks from robbers" (Neh. ii. 9; 1 Esdr. v. 2). It was, however, scarcely from any superabundance of "lofty courage" or "trust in God"[3] that he so acted; he was evidently full of apprehension, but he smothered his fears in his own bosom and kept them to himself lest he should betray a want of confidence, which would be dishonouring, both to his own character and to the God whom he served.

In default of any such sign of the Great King's favour as a royal escort would have been, it was the more incumbent on the

[1] See above, page 22.

[2] "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 138. [3] Ibid.

Jewish leader to obtain from the Court and carry with him into his province abundant written credentials, addressed to the official representatives of the Persian government in the regions which he was about to visit. Such credentials it is evident that he applied for and received. His main commission was "endorsed by the Seven leading members of the Royal Council"[1] (Ezra vii. 14, 28)—the great "princes of Persia and Media which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom"[2] (Esther i. 14; Herod. iii. 84). It was, no doubt, "written in the name of the king," Artaxerxes, and "signed with the king's ring" (Esther iii. 12; viii. 8). It set forth that "Artaxerxes, king of kings, had made a decree that all they of the people of Israel, and of their priests and Levites, throughout his realm, which were minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, might go thither with Ezra the priest, the perfect scribe of the law of the God of heaven. Forasmuch," it went on, "as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; and to carry the silver and the gold which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, and all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: that thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat-offerings and their drink-offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. The vessels also which are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, unto an hundred talents of silver and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred

[1] "History of Israel," pp. 136, 137.

[2] Compare the "Behistun Inscription," col. iv. par. 18.

baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinim, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to outlawry, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment."[1]

Besides this general commission, Ezra seems also to have taken with him from the Court a number of shorter documents, addressed to the several satraps, governors, and royal treasurers beyond the Euphrates, in the name and with the authority of the king, requiring them to do certain acts (Ezra vii. 21–23), and abstain from doing certain others (ibid. ver. 24), which were to be delivered severally to the individuals to whom they were addressed (ibid. viii. 36). Thus he was abundantly supplied with vouchers for his high dignity, and authority to speak in the king's name—vouchers of very much the same character as the *firmans* which at the present day are issued by the government of the Sublime Porte.

[1] Ezra vii. 12–26.

CHAPTER IV.

GOVERNORSHIP OF JUDÆA

Journey from Babylon to Jerusalem—First stage, Babylon to Ahava or Hit—Halt there—Accession to the body of emigrants—Journey from Hit—Choice of routes—Route probably taken—Halt at Jericho—Arrival at Jerusalem—Delivery of the sacred vessels and treasure—Solemn sacrifice—Ezra's governmental position—Appeal made to him by the princes—Ezra's arrangement of the mixed marriage question.

THE first stage of the journey between Babylon and Jerusalem presents little difficulty, and scarcely offers a choice of route. The course of the traveller, whether he journeys alone or forms one of a caravan, must be up the stream of the Euphrates, either on one side of it or the other. The left or eastern bank of the river is that usually preferred, since the country to the west of the Euphrates is for some distance marshy, and in wet seasons impassable,[1] while the whole tract is more exposed than the left bank to the attacks of the predatory Arab tribes, who roam freely over the great Desert which intervenes between Mesopotamia and Palestine. Ezra, with his caravan of six thousand Israelites, probably quitted Babylon by the north gate—the gate of Nineveh,[2] and proceeded north-westward along the river-course from the site of Babylon to that of Is or Hit, a distance of one hundred and forty miles. This he would accomplish in the space of nine days,[3] without much trouble or

[1] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. i. pp. 11, 12.

[2] Herod. iii. 155.

[3] Herodotus makes the distance a journey of eight days (i. 179), which might be the time taken by an ordinary traveller; but a caravan would be slower.

fatigue. His way lay through cultivated districts, in a part of the empire which was well watched and guarded, perhaps along a "Royal Road," though not the Royal Road which is described by Herodotus.[1] The caravan under his charge carried tents (Ezra viii. 15), which were pitched at the end of each day's journey, and sufficiently protected the travellers from the heavy night dews, and from any possible storms or other changes in the weather. It was accompanied, no doubt, by a considerable number of baggage animals—asses, camels, mules, and perhaps horses. The colonists who went out with Zerubbabel—forty-two thousand in number—were attended by above eight thousand beasts of burthen (ibid. ii. 66, 67), or one to each five of the emigrants. If we suppose the same proportion to have been maintained by the later emigration, their baggage animals would have amounted to above eight hundred and fifty. The great bulk of them were, no doubt, asses; but it may be presumed that a certain number were horses or mules, and the emigrants are not likely to have adventured on the journey without a body of some fifty or sixty camels. They could not possibly avoid encountering stretches of desert; and the camel—the "ship of the desert"—is a *sine qua non* where such regions have to be traversed.

The start of the caravan from Babylon would offer a strange scene, picturesque and exciting, but full of tenderness and pathos. The friends and relatives of the emigrants, though resolved on remaining behind, would yet flock to the place of departure, bent on escorting their kindred for a certain distance. There would be agonizing partings of brother from brother, of parent from child, perhaps of youths and maidens, betrothed one to the other. While a holy enthusiasm sustained the majority of the emigrants, there were probably some with whom fear predominated over hope, who wept at leaving their old homes, and shrank in their inmost hearts from the perils of the unknown future. The friends whom they were about to leave behind would yield still more to sorrow and depression of spirits, and, with the *abandon* of Orientals, would "weep and wail without stint."[2] Meanwhile, a babel of sounds would strike the ear, as the beasts that were being laden groaned, and their drivers lashed or goaded them with much objurgation and abuse, and horses neighed, and asses brayed, and mules stamped, and

[1] Herod. v. 52.

[2] Compare Herod. viii. 99.

kicked, and squealed. At length all would be ready; the caravan would be marshalled and arranged; the guide or "captain of the caravan" would step forth; and the rest would follow, spears flashing, bells tinkling, banners (it may be) flying, turbans nodding, children laughing, women screaming, men shouting or asking the blessing of God upon their setting forth.

The journey to Hit—the modern representative of the ancient Is, Ihi, or Ahava[1]—occupied, as we have said, nine days. The march would probably begin each day in the early morning, an hour or so before sunrise, and would continue till the sun reached a certain altitude, when it would be too hot to proceed, and the signal would be given for the midday halt. A shady spot would, if possible, be chosen, where a grove of palms, or a tangled cluster of acacias and tamarisks, gave a prospect of protection from the solar rays. The banks of the Euphrates, or of some canal or branch stream flowing in or out of it, would on most occasions be sought, that there might be sure to be abundant water for the entire company and also for their beasts. Tents would not be pitched; but the travellers would sit, or lie along the ground, in the densest shade that they could obtain, and rest, or chat, or take some slight refreshment, or indulge in a short siesta. Ere long, however, the signal would again be given, and the march resumed, this time under unpleasant conditions—the sun would burn overhead—the atmosphere would glow and quiver—the feet would be weary, the limbs would ache, the mouth would be dry and parched. The hours would drag slowly on, till at length the sun declined, lost his fiery heat, and then suddenly set. As night closed in, tents would be pitched, watch fires lighted, guards set, carpets strewn on the ground, camels unladen, horses and mules hobbled or picketed, the beasts generally fed and watered, after which, in a little time, silence would fall upon the camp, and scarcely a sound would break the stillness, till the dawn of another day flushed the sky.

At Ahava, or Hit, Ezra made preparations for a longer halt than the ordinary one. In the march of a caravan or of an army, it is always necessary to allow stoppages of some days' duration, at intervals, for rest and refreshment, and to enable

[1] See the author's "Herodotus," vol. i. p. 300, and compare Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," *ad. voc.* Ahava, and Stanley "Lectures," vol. iii. p. 116.

the stragglers who have dropped out to rejoin. Cyrus, when he was hastening at his best speed from Asia Minor to Babylon, in order to attack his brother, Artaxerxes Mnemon, made several such halts.[1] Ezra now determined on a halt of three days. Ahava was a pleasant spot, on the banks of the Euphrates, where a small stream flowed into it from the east, and at the point where the Babylonian alluvium terminates, and the rolling plain of Upper Mesopotamia has its commencement. It was a resort of merchants, who frequented it on account of its bitumen springs, which furnished that valuable article of commerce, and are still unexhausted.[2] Ezra, having ordered the tents to be pitched, proceeded to hold a muster of the colonists, who were, perhaps, now for the first time counted, and assigned to their several families (Ezra viii. 1–15). In the course of his review, or on making out the muster-roll, the Jewish leader was greatly struck with the fact, that while a certain number of the priests had accompanied him from Babylon, there was not in the entire caravan a single person belonging to the class of simple Levites. A disinclination on the part of the Levites to return to Jerusalem had manifested itself at the former enrolment of colonists under Zerubbabel,[3] when the priests had outnumbered the Levites in the proportion of nearly sixty to one (ibid. ii. 36, 40). But the defection on the present occasion was still more pronounced, and Ezra thought it his duty to make an attempt to remedy it. There was a Jewish settlement at a place called Casiphia in the neighbourhood of Ahava (ibid. viii. 17). The exact site is unknown, since Casiphia does not elsewhere obtain mention; but it was probably not more than a few miles off. To this place, where he knew that there were Levites and Nethinim, Ezra sent a formal embassy,[4] consisting of twelve Israelites, to represent the twelve tribes, and begged the Casiphians to reinforce his colony by a supply of these lower ministers and servants of the Temple, who were quite as much needed as priests for the service of the sanctuary.[5] The Casiphians, who had at their head a chief called Iddo, readily con-

[1] Xen. "Anab." i. 2, § 6, 9; 3, § 1; 4, § 1, &c.

[2] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. i. p. 39.

[3] See Ewald, "Hist. of Israel," vol. v. p. 84.

[4] Ibid. vol. v. p. 138, note 3.

[5] See Ex. xxxii. 26–29; Numb. iii. 5–51; 1 Kings viii. 4; 1 Chron. xxiv 20–31; 2 Chron. v. 11–13, &c.

sented; and Ezra in this way obtained an addition to his followers of thirty-eight Levites of full age, and two hundred and twenty Nethinim. As these individuals were, no doubt, accompanied by their families, we may regard the caravan, which Ezra was conducting, as henceforth increased by somewhat more than a thousand members, or raised from six thousand to seven thousand.

With his increased numbers, Ezra, after his three days' rest, set forth from Ahava, probably still ascending the course of the Euphrates on its left or eastern bank. He would pass Anat,[1] on its island in the middle of the river, in long. 42° nearly, and proceed thence westward to Irzah or Werdi, and then north-westward to Sirki, which the Greeks and Romans called Circesium.[2] This city lay on the left bank of the Euphrates, immediately below its junction with the Khabour, Habor, or Aborrhas,[3] the last of its great affluents, in lat. 35° 10′ nearly. It occupied an important position. Commanding the courses of the two streams which washed its walls, it was also, almost certainly, connected by a line of route with Tadmor or Palmyra, and was a mart for the Syrian and Phœnician trade which passed by way of Damascus and Tadmor into Assyria. It was here that Ezra must finally have determined whether he would attempt the comparatively short passage across the Syrian desert, from Sirki to Tadmor, from Tadmor to Kennesarin, and from Kennesarin to Damascus, or whether he would pursue the route ordinarily taken by armies, following the course of the Euphrates for two hundred or two hundred and fifty miles further, past Thapsacus and Balis, to the 36th parallel of latitude, and then striking across the chalky upland by Chalcis and Aleppo to the Lower Orontes valley, which would conduct him to Palestine.

The late Dean Stanley suggested in his work upon the Jewish Church, that the route actually selected by Esther was that which crossed the desert;[4] but this view is highly questionable. The direct distance from Circesium to Damascus was not less than two hundred and sixty miles, or, at the rate at which Ezra seems

[1] Layard, "Nin. and Babylon," p. 355; Fox Talbot, "Assyrian Texts," p. 21; Isid. Char. "Mans. Parth." p. 4.

[2] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. i. p. 198. [3] Ibid. p. 187.

[4] "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 116.

to have moved,[1] a journey of nearly three weeks. The route was almost absolutely waterless. Well-appointed caravans, no doubt, occasionally travelled it, but scarcely unless they had made arrangements with friendly tribes to allow them the use of the few wells, or even to furnish them with water at intervals, along the course of it. And, without an armed escort, the attempt to reach Jerusalem by this route would have been most dangerous. Ezra had refused an escort, or rather had not applied for one. He knew of "enemies in the way" (Ezra viii. 31). He must have been well aware that the Arab tribes who peopled the sandy waste were for the most part a predatory race—a race whose "hand was against every man, and every man's hand against them" (Gen. xvi. 12)—he could scarcely hope to cross the desert without attracting their attention, and he could still less dream of resisting them successfully in arms. Whatever his trust in "the good hand of his God" (ibid. vii. 9; viii. 22), he would not be likely to thrust himself into the midst of unnecessary dangers in reliance upon miraculous aid, when a little prudence and a little patience were alone needed to enable him to avoid them. The route along the great river to Balis, and across Northern Syria between the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh parallels was for the most part well watered, and was a comparatively safe one. It was not altogether secure from occasional Bedouin raids, or without a sprinkling of thievish tribes among its permanent inhabitants; but so large a caravan as that which Ezra led might hope to traverse it without very serious risk. The additional distance would not exceed a hundred and fifty miles, or two hundred at the utmost, and this distance could be accomplished, under favourable circumstances, in a fortnight.

We think it best, therefore, to suppose that the prudent and circumspect leader, who well understood the perils of the way, having crossed the Khabour at Sirki, probably by a bridge of boats, continued his journey along the left or eastern bank of the great river from the Khabour to the Belik, and from the Belik at least as high as Balis, before crossing the stream and adventuring himself on the Syrian side of it. From Balis there was an established route, by way of Aleppo (Haleb), to the valley of the Orontes, and this route it is probable that Ezra

[1] Including stoppages, he does not seem to have travelled at the rate of more than about twelve and a half miles a day.

pursued with his caravan of seven thousand persons. Progress along the dry and chalky upland was, no doubt, slow and difficult. Here probably were found "the enemy and those that lay in wait by the way" (Ezra viii. 31); and here there would be some scantiness in the supply of water; but enough for the needs of the caravan was probably carried in skins by the camels and asses from the Euphrates to the river of Aleppo, and from the river of Aleppo to the Orontes or Arantu.[1] The difficulties of the long journey were now well-nigh over. Cœle-Syria, or the double valley of the Orontes and Litany, is a long grassy plain, running southwards between two mountain ranges, with at first a gradual slight ascent to about lat. 34° 10′, and then a gradual slight descent to lat. 33° 20′. At this point Palestine is reached, and either the Jordan valley may be descended from Dan (or Laish) to Jericho, and then the steep incline ascended from Jericho to Jerusalem, or else a more westerly line may be taken through the Galilean hills, across the Esdraelon plain, and then along the highlands of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin to the Holy City. Ezra would be likely to follow the more eastern of these two routes, which was at once the more level and the more friendly. He would naturally avoid Samaria, where were gathered together "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (ibid. iv. 1), and would thus be led to avoid the entire Samaritan highland. In the Jordan vale he would find no enemies, and its luxuriant vegetation would attract him, when he was fresh from traversing the comparatively bleak tracks of Chalcitis and Cœle-Syria. He would travel slowly along it, not following the tortuous stream,[2] but keeping it generally in sight, and might complete the journey from Dan to Jericho in a little more than a week. Amid the lovely palm-groves of Jericho[3] he would probably make his final rest, before affronting the difficulties of the long and steep ascent, along the side of the Wady Kelt, from Jericho to Jerusalem.

"The whole of the Wady Kelt is singularly wild and romantic, for it is simply a deep rent in the mountains, scarcely twenty

[1] This is the form of the name in the Assyrian Inscriptions.

[2] See Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 277; Petermann in "Geographical Journal," vol. xviii. p. 94. The English sailors who accompanied the Petermann Expedition are said to have remarked, "The Jordan is the crookedest stream what is" (ibid. p. 113).

[3] Deut. xxxiv. 3.

yards across at the bottom, filled with tall canes, and beds of rushes, to which you look down over high perpendicular walls of rock. Its cliffs are full of caves. . . . White chalk hills rise in the wildest shapes on each side, forming strange peaks, sharp rough sierras, and fanciful pyramid-like cones; the whole seamed in all directions by deep torrent beds. Not a tree is to be seen on the bare slopes. Nor is the end of the pass less striking, for it is guarded, as it were, by two tall sloping peaks of white chalk, with each of which special traditions and legends are connected."[1] The road from Jericho does not attempt to follow the deep ravine of the Wady Kelt, but "skirts" it.[2] Sometimes the track "leads along the edge of sheer precipices; at others, up rocks so steep and rough that it needs every care to prevent a fall."[3] The scenery is everywhere gloomy and forbidding, framed in by wild, desolate hills, ever more and more bare and stony. There is little animal or vegetable life at the present day, and there can never have been very much. The road reaches its highest point by a sort of "rocky staircase,"[4] in the vicinity of the Bir-el-Khut, the only spring to be found on the entire route—an unfailing source of clear, sweet water, probably the ancient En-shemesh, or "Spring of the Sun," mentioned in the Book of Joshua (xviii. 17). From the Bir-el-Khut there is another steep ascent to Bethany, after which the road descends into the Kedron valley, and Jerusalem presents itself to the gaze of the weary traveller.

It was on the "first day of the fifth month" (Ezra vii. 9); in the burning heat of July—that Ezra with his company reached the Holy City. They had been just four months upon their journey. The direct distance of Jerusalem from Babylon is not more than about 520 miles, but the circuitous route pursued had almost doubled the length of the way. And long halts had no doubt been made at several places besides Ahava. The "king's commissions" had had to be delivered to the Persian satraps and subordinate governors to the west of the Euphrates, and *détours* had perhaps had to be made for this purpose, as well as to avoid robber tribes or other enemies. The result was that the average rate of progress had been little more than eight miles *per diem*, and four months had been consumed in travel-

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. ii. p. 69.
[2] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 199.
[3] Geikie, p. 68.
[4] Tristram, p 196.

ling a distance that was usually accomplished in less than three. The wearied travellers, moreover, on their arrival, required another spell of rest; and it was not till three days after, that Ezra, with his chief priests and Levites, felt equal to appearing before the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the city, to make Artaxerxes' intentions known to them, and discharge a special commission which they had received at his hands. Then, "on the fourth day" (ibid. viii. 33), notice was given by Ezra to the Temple priests, and a solemn conference held, at which he made over to them the gold and silver vessels for the Temple service, together with the gold and silver bullion, which Artaxerxes and his lords had sent as an offering to the God of Israel, and which Ezra had at Ahava put under the charge of twelve priests and twelve Levites (ibid. viii. 24), for safe conveyance to Jerusalem. Having made over these treasures to the custodians of the Temple, Ezra and the colonists who had come with him offered a sacrifice on a large scale to the God of Israel, "*twelve* bullocks for *all Israel*, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, and *twelve* he-goats for a sin-offering: all this was a burnt-offering to the Lord" (Ezra viii. 35). As before, when Zerubbabel made his great sacrifice on the dedication of the second Temple, so now Ezra put prominently forward the idea that the returned exiles represented "all Israel," were the people of God in their totality—not a remnant of one tribe only escaped from barbarian masters, but the entire nation restored to their native land, and planted there a second time, with a full right and title to all the old privileges and promises attached to the "seed of Abraham"— an indefeasible right of dominion over the entire tract which God had granted to the first patriarch (Gen. xv. 18–21), extending from "the river (or rather, the torrent)[1] of Egypt even to the great river, the river Euphrates."

His mission thus by solemn rites inaugurated, the new-comer had to obtain recognition of the dignified position assigned to him by his royal master, and to arrange with the existing authorities, what exactly his relations were to be with them. Jerusalem, since the time of Zerubbabel, had had, it would seem, no special governor. It had remained under the authority of the satrap of Syria, who occasionally honoured it with his presence, and had a residence there, or at any rate a tribunal.

[1] נחל מצרים Gen. xv. 18.

from which he delivered sentences, and which was known as "the throne of the governor on this side the river" (Neh. iii. 7). In his absence authority rested, partly with the high priest, partly with the "princes," or "elders" of the people, who met together, from time to time, in council, and discharged the necessary municipal functions. Had Ezra come as "governor," the position of affairs would have been clear—Jerusalem would have reverted to its former condition under Zerubbabel, and all would have been plain sailing; but, under the royal decree which gave him his authority, Ezra was not exactly "governor'—he was, as Ewald expresses it,[2] "Chief Judge." He was "empowered to settle everything relating to the religion of the Judæans, and the life which was regulated by it, and to maintain everything quietly as it was established by law. But the manner in which the details were to be carried out could not be traced beforehand by the Persian king: it depended solely on the ancient sacred law, and the actual circumstances of the time."[2] Not much difficulty, however, seems to have been experienced in establishing a *modus vivendi*. Ezra was accepted as chief director of the affairs of the nation; but the previous local authorities were also maintained in office, and acted under him as his subordinates, not only in Jerusalem (Ezra x. 8), but also throughout the country districts (ibid. ver. 14). "In the course of the first few months, the new chief judge was," as Ewald says,[3] "settled down in Jerusalem in tolerable quiet"—his administrative functions were admitted without question, and the other officials, both ecclesiastical and civil, worked under him, apparently, without friction or jealousy (ibid. ix. 1; x. 5, 14–16).

It was not till several months had gone by without disturbance or special anxiety, that Ezra was suddenly asked to turn his attention to a matter of the deepest interest to the community. It is conjectured that "the copies of the Law which Ezra had brought from Chaldæa must have become in the interval known to the settlement in Palestine,"[4] and that it was these copies which brought home to the settlers generally the fact, that they were living in complete disregard of one of the simplest and plainest of the Mosaical directions. God had commanded, by Moses, that there should be no intermarriages between his

[2] "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 139. [2] Ibid., *l. s. c.* [3] Ibid.
[4] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 118.

peculiar people and the heathen races by which they were surrounded—"thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. vii. 3); but this command had, during the early ages, been frequently transgressed (Ruth i. 4; 2 Sam. iii. 3; 1 Kings iii. 1, xi. 1, xvi. 31), and, after the return from the Captivity, had apparently been wholly forgotten. Foreign marriages had become matters of every-day occurrence. The colonists, who had not perhaps been accompanied on their return journey by an adequate proportion of females, had taken wives of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites — Levites and priests had been as guilty as the common people, and the upper classes had been implicated in the trespass "in a quite special degree."[1] And the consequences had been such as were to be expected. "The people of Israel had not separated themselves from the people of the lands in respect of their abominations" (Ezra ix. 1)—intimate association with idolaters had led to a toleration of idolatry within the limits of the Holy Land, and probably even of the "Holy Mountain"—superstitious practices of various kinds had crept in, and purity of religion was seriously endangered. A modern pseudo-liberalism objects to the narrowness of view, which induced the leaders of the Jewish community to bring this "comparatively trivial and in some respects questionable" controversy before the notice of Ezra. "Larger, nobler, and freer views," we are told,[2] "belonged to the earlier and also to the later portion of the Jewish history. . . . There had not been the faintest murmur audible when the ancestors of David once and over again married into a Moabite family, nor when David took among his wives a daughter of Geshur; nor is there a more exuberant Psalm than that which celebrates the union of an Israelite king with an Egyptian or Tyrian princess (Psa. xlv. 12, 16). Even if the patriarchal alliance of Abraham with the Egyptian Hagar or the Arabian Keturah, or the marriage of Moses with the Midianite or the Ethiopian, provoked a passing censure, it was instantly and strongly repelled by the loftier tone of the sacred narrative. Nor is there in the New Testament a passage more redolent of acknowledged wisdom

[1] Ewald, *l. s. c.*, Compare Ezra ix. 2: "The hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass."

[2] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 117.

and charity than that in which the Rabbi of Tarsus tolerates the union of the heathen husband and the believing wife (1 Cor. vii. 14). Nor are there more critical incidents in Christian history than those which record the union of Clovis with Clotilda, or of Ethelbert with Bertha." But it is not denied that the "narrower view," which after all has the sanction of the "Rabbi of Tarsus," who bids his converts "not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. vi. 14), was suited to the times, and helped to "keep alive the spirit of exclusive patriotism and of uncompromising zeal,"[1] which alone enabled the community to maintain its existence during the times of depression and of trial that were approaching.

But, whatever moderns may think of the policy of Jewish isolation, and however much they may prefer to it "the large freedom of Isaiah,"[2] or the policy of attempting to convert the world by fusion with it, at any rate the holiest instincts of the religious Jews of the time were strongly set in the contrary direction. Ezra was appealed to by a certain number of the foremost members of the community (Ezra ix. 1) to stop a practice which to them seemed not only wrong, but fraught with danger to the best interests of the nation. To Ezra himself the revelation came as a shock and an astonishment. Nothing in his Babylonian experience had prepared him for such a falling away. He was "seized with the most vehement horror" at the disclosure of it.[3] "When I heard this thing," he says, "I rent my garments and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head, and sat down astonied" (ibid. ver. 3). "Overwhelmed with horror, he sank involuntarily on the ground, and all the men of more tender conscience gradually assembled round their leader, still utterly unstrung, and wailing deeply; but not till about the time for evening sacrifice could he recover from the profound shock he had sustained sufficiently to pour forth his feelings in prayer. In words wrung from his inmost soul he implored God to have pity on His people, who, though long sunk so low by their ancient sins, had now, by this violation of His express command, imperilled

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 122.

[2] Ibid., p. 117. It is not at all clear that Isaiah would have tolerated any fusion of Jews with heathen in his own day, though he may have looked forward to an ultimate fusion in the Messiah's kingdom.

[3] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 139.

even the feeble commencement of a somewhat improved condition, but now vouchsafed them by the grace of God."[1] It seemed to him that the very continuance of the people's existence depended on an immediate and complete reform—on an entire relinquishment of the evil practice which had grown up, and on taking such other steps as might be necessary for purging out the fatal corruption which had been admitted into the heart of the nation. The national life hung on God's good pleasure—if after so solemn a warning as the Captivity, the restored nation, just allowed a deliverance, should again fall away, openly break God's commandments, and join in affinity with a people of abomination, might it not be expected that God would be angry with them till He had consumed them, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping (ibid. ver. 14)? But, alone, he would have been powerless. What can one man do against a multitude? He had no armed force at his disposal, and the chief men of the nation were the chief sinners (ibid. ver. 2). It must have been with a deep sense of relief, that the Chief Judge, lying prone in the Temple Court before the house of God, heard the utterance of "a distinguised layman"[2]—one of the principal of those who had congregated about him, one Shechaniah—who, "in the name of the whole community, confessed the guilt of the people, and further declared their true desire to act in full compliance with the Law, even in this respect."[3] "We have trespassed against our God," he said, "and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the Law. Arise, for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it" (Ezra x. 2–4). Upon this, "the prostrate, weeping mourner sprang to his feet, and exacted an oath from all present, that they would assist his efforts; and, having done this, he disappeared, and withdrew into the chamber of the high priest's son, in one of the upper storeys of the Temple, and there remained in complete abstinence, even from bread and water, for the three days which were to

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 141.
[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid, pp. 141, 142.

elapse before a solemn assembly could be convened to ascertain the national sentiment."[1]

The solemn assembly was then convened. Messengers were sent "throughout Judah" (Ezra x. 7) "to all the children of the captivity," and proclamation was made, requiring them all—*i.e.*, all the males of full age—to gather themselves together to Jerusalem upon the third day, under the heavy penalty, on such as should absent themselves, of the confiscation of their goods, and their expulsion from the congregation of the faithful. The territory occupied by the returned Hebrews was still so small, that the short space allowed was sufficient, both for the distribution of the summonses, and for the coming together of the people in obedience to them. It was deep winter—December probably—and the heavy rains had set in (ibid. ver. 9); but still the whole people answered to the call made upon them, and on the third day—the twentieth of Chisleu—the men of Jerusalem, and all the outlying inhabitants of the hills of Judah and Benjamin, congregated in the open space in front of the great gate of the Temple—"shivering," it may be, "in the raw ungenial weather,"[2] but resolute to learn from their rulers, what the occasion was which had necessitated their being brought together, and to take prompt action with respect to it. The exposition of the circumstances was soon made; the danger into which they had brought the nation was explained; and the only course which in his judgment could avert the ruin of the people was set forth by Ezra (ibid. vers. 10, 11). It would not be enough to resolve that the mixed marriages should be discontinued in the future; the past must be, as far as possible, undone—there must be a general dismissal of all the foreign wives, together with any children which they might have borne to their husbands. The decree thus formulated was adopted by the assembly, apparently without any opposition.[3] It was agreed, however, not to hurry the matter. A Commission of Inquiry was appointed, consisting of Ezra and a number of the "rulers," who should investigate each supposed case of unlawful marriage separately, and decide according to the evidence. When the parties inculpated belonged to the country towns of

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. pp. 119, 120

[2] Ibid. p. 121.

[3] There is some doubt whether a certain weak opposition is not hinted at in Ezra x. 15. (See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 419.)

Judah and Benjamin, the Commission was to be assisted by persons with local knowledge, such as the elders and judges of the several places (ibid. ver. 14), so that the truth might be clearly ascertained in every instance. The Court sat *de die in diem*, except probably on the Sabbath, and brought its labours to a close in the course of three months (ibid. vers. 16, 17). The result was that four priests of the high-priestly family, together with thirteen other priests, ten Levites, and eighty-six laymen (ibid. vers. 18–43)—many of them of high rank (Ezra ix. 2)—were found to have been involved in the trespass, and were made to dismiss their foreign wives and foreign children. The four most exalted offenders were further required to make public acknowledgment of their transgression by each of them offering to God a ram as a trespass-offering (Ezra x. 19).

Thus was this scandal put an end to, and a very real danger, for the time at any rate, escaped. The decision which Ezra enforced so inexorably, must doubtless have borne hardly upon many of the repudiated wives and of the cast-off children. These innocent ones suffered through the guilt of their husbands and fathers, who ought never to have contracted such marriages. But the suffering involved would probably not have been very great. In the East there has always prevailed a large facility of divorce; and the discarded wife, unless where her own misconduct has provoked the repudiation, is received back by her family without incurring reproach or disgrace. She has a right to reclaim her dowry at her husband's hands, and, if she goes back to her parents, she finds her status in the household but little lowered. No slur rests upon her children, who live with the other children of the house on terms of equality. But Ezra would scarcely have felt himself bound to consider consequences. He would regard himself as having a plain duty to perform, which was to enforce the Law at whatever cost. It is quite clear that he read the Law as absolutely prohibitive of mixed marriages (Ezra ix. 10–14)—*i.e.*, as not only forbidding their inception, but their continuance. Strictly speaking, he probably looked upon them as unreal marriages, and so as no better than ordinary illicit connections. For the evils which flow from such unions, those who make them, and not those who break them, are responsible.

The record of Ezra's governorship of Judæa terminates, somewhat abruptly, with the list of those who had "taken

strange wives," and whose marriages were annulled by the Commission of Inquiry. The space covered is the short one of eight months. It seems probable that Ezra, soon after he had succeeded in effecting his reform, was either recalled by Artaxerxes to the Court, or returned of his own accord to make the report, which he had been commissioned to make (ch. vii. 14), on the general condition of the Palestinian province.

CHAPTER V.

RELATIONS WITH NEHEMIAH.

Blank interval of twelve years in the history of Ezra—Possible return to the Persian Court—Second visit of Ezra to Jerusalem as coadjutor to Nehemiah—Their joint labours—Restoration of the Feast of Tabernacles — Proclamation of a fast day—Renewal of the Covenant — Special promises—Assumption of fresh obligations—Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem—Ezra's position with regard to Eliashib.

A GAP of twelve or thirteen years occurs between the narrative with which the Book of Ezra ends, and the next appearance which Ezra makes upon the scene of history. It is uncertain how he was employed during this interval. Ewald supposes that he remained at Jerusalem, and there "lived and laboured, . . . leading back the whole national life, as far as possible, to the letter of the written Law," and further, "with unwearied perseverance," training and educating "a number of younger scribes and judges, to persevere and develop still further in the community his own special kind of ability, both as a scholar and as a judge."[1] But arguments of great weight have been brought forward against this view. "As Ezra's commission was only of a temporary nature," says Bishop Arthur Hervey, "to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, and to carry thither the silver and gold which the king and his counsellors had freely offered unto the God of Israel, and as there is no trace whatever of his presence at Jerusalem between the eighth and the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, it seems probable, that, after he had effected his reformation, and had appointed competent judges and magistrates, with authority to maintain

[1] "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 143.

it, he himself returned to the King of Persia. This is in itself what one would expect, and what is borne out by the parallel case of Nehemiah ; and it also accounts for the abrupt termination of Ezra's narrative, and for that relapse of the Jews into their former irregularities which is apparent in the Book of Nehemiah. Such a relapse, and such a state of affairs at Jerusalem in general, could scarcely have occurred if Ezra had continued there."[1] On these grounds it seems best to conclude, that from B.C. 457 to B.C. 445 the great priest and scribe was absent from the Holy City, either employed by the Persian monarch in other secular work, or pursuing his literary labours in retirement, at Babylon or elsewhere.

But a time came when, again, a call was made on him to return to Jerusalem—the Cradle and Citadel of his race—and resume an active superintendence over the community, which had been the object of his deep affection and diligent care twelve years before. But, this time, he was not to be in sole charge. Providence had provided him with a coadjutor in the person of Nehemiah—a man after his own heart—zealous, active, intensely pious, and profoundly anxious for the true well-being of his nation. Nehemiah occupied the position, which had been formerly held by Zerubbabel. He was Tirshatha, or Governor,[2] appointed to the post by Artaxerxes himself (Neh. ii. 5, 6), and responsible to no one but the king. It is a reasonable conjecture that Nehemiah, when he became practically acquainted with the difficulties of the post conferred on him, made request to Artaxerxes, that Ezra, whom he may have known at the Persian Court, or of whose high capacity he may have heard at Jerusalem, should be sent out to him to aid him in his work.[3] The two were excellently fitted to assist and supplement each other. One possessed in a high degree the qualities needed in a political leader, was an active warrior, a sagacious statesman, well suited to grapple with practical dangers and difficulties of all kinds ; the other was above all hings a teacher, able to impress men's minds, to expound, convince, persuade, instruct, educate, guide in the way of true knowledge and pure religion. Nehemiah's practical good sense showed him, when he had battled with the external difficulties

[1] "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 605.

[2] See Nehem. viii. 9 ; x. 1.

[3] See Bishop Arthur Hervey in the "Dict. of the Bible," *l. s. c.*

of the situation, and overcome them, that the internal difficulties were, after all, the greatest, and that, to meet them, he needed a man of spiritual insight and influence, who could bring to bear upon the people the weight of authority which still remained to the priests, together with the magic of a high personal reputation for wisdom and sanctity, such as would incline all to submit to him.

We are not allowed to witness the meeting of the two great reformers and restorers of the Judæan community; but we can well imagine the joy with which the vexed and harassed Civil Governor would greet the arrival of the great Ecclesiastical Chief, whom he had summoned from his business or his studies, to lend once more a helping hand in the re-establishment of the Jewish State, as well as the satisfaction of this chief himself on perceiving the progress in material prosperity, which the Holy City had made during his absence (Neh. vii. 1–4). Ezra's arrival seems a little to have preceded the time for the observance of the annual Feast of Tabernacles, which fell in the autumn, after the completion of the harvest (Exod. xxiii. 16), when all the fruits of the field had been gathered in. That festival, though restored by Zerubbabel on his return to Jerusalem (Ezra iii. 4), had, it appears, fallen into desuetude; but, under the circumstances of the time, Nehemiah and Ezra determined to revive it. Their object, apparently, was to arouse the Judæan community from the state of depression into which it had sunk under the trials of the period through the widespread poverty (Neh. v. 2–5) and the hostility of the surrounding nations. The general feeling of the time was one of sadness and despondency. When God's Word was read to the people, instead of bracing them to noble resolutions and brave efforts, it only drew from them a burst of grief (ibid. viii. 9), indicative of relaxed fibre and moral weakness. Ezra and Nehemiah set themselves to resist this tendency—"mourn not," they cried, "nor weep. Go your way; eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. . . . Hold your peace, . . . be not grieved—your strength is in the joy of the Lord" (ibid. vers. 10, 11). It was the seventh month—the Jubilee month of the year—the time for joy and rejoicing. Ezra read, of set purpose, to the people those passages of the Law (Lev. xxiii. 34–43; Deut. xvi. 13–15) which required the celebration of the harvest festival with gladness and with thanksgiving, and

insisted on a compliance with them; and the people at length, changing their mood with the facility of Orientals,[1] poured forth in crowds from Jerusalem to the gardens of Olivet, and there stripped off their boughs from the olives, and the palms, and the myrtles, and the oleasters with which its sides were thickly clothed, and returned with them into the city, where, on the flat roofs of the houses and in the courts round which they were built, and in some of the Courts of the Temple, and in the open spaces before the city gates, they wove themselves leafy arbours of the green boughs and branches, and gave themselves up to rejoicing and festivity. Thus was there "very great gladness" (ibid. ver. 17). "Also day by day, from the first day until the last, Ezra read in the book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner" (ibid. ver. 18).

The Feast was over—the "solemn assembly" of the eighth day had been held—and the Judæan community, assembled from the furthest points of the territory, from Hebron and Beersheba, from Ziklag, Jarmuth, and Lachish, from Bethel, from Jericho and Tekoa,[2] expected probably to be dismissed to their homes, when a further religious duty was laid upon them. Their desire to weep and mourn and afflict themselves, which Nehemiah and Ezra had checked, when it showed itself inopportunely on the first day of Tisri (Neh. viii. 2–9), was now to be gratified. The feast having been celebrated, and one day of rest allowed them, the twenty-fourth of Tisri was appointed by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities to be a day of humiliation and abstinence, on which another solemn assembly should be held, a confession of sin made, and a formal renewal of their covenant with God entered into by the whole people (ibid. ix. 1–38). It was to this that all the previous solemnities—the reading and expounding of the Law (ch. viii. 3–8), the gatherings of priests and Levites (vers. 4, 7), the punctilious keeping, according to all the ancient rites (vers. 15–18), of the Tabernacle Feast, had been intended to lead up. Ezra and Nehemiah were bent on practical reforms of a somewhat sweeping character, and had determined to take this opportunity of introducing them. They would strike while the iron was hot. Finding the people malleable, repentant, convinced of sin, and

[1] Compare Herod. viii. 99.

[2] See Neh. iii. 2, 5; xi. 27, 29, 30, 31.

eagerly desirous of better things, they resolved, after the example of former rulers,[1] to call upon the nation to make the most solemn profession possible of its complete acceptance of the Law, and of its determination henceforth to live up to it. This would enable them to point out neglects of various kinds, which they regarded as important, and to initiate arrangements which should prevent such neglects in the future. All went well for the zealous Reformers. The real heart of the people had been touched; and on the twenty and fourth day of the seventh month, "the children of Israel assembled with fasting, and with sack-cloth and earth upon them" (Neh. ix. 1). They had carefully "separated themselves from all strangers" (ibid. ver. 2), and having gathered themselves together in the Temple Court, "they stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (ibid.). Passages from the Law were read to them by the Levites during a fourth part of the day (ibid. ver. 3); then during another fourth part the people knelt and confessed their sins to God and worshipped Him; after this, they rose up from their knees, and, standing each in his place, blessed and praised the Lord (ibid. ver. 5), according to a set form of words, which Ezra probably composed,[2] and which has been preserved to us in the Book of Nehemiah (ibid. vers. 5–38). God's many mercies were recounted, and the people's many backslidings; His justice was acknowledged, and His mercy appealed to; it was solemnly represented to Him that His people were "in great distress" (ibid. ver. 37); and then the covenant was renewed—not, as on former occasions, merely by word of mouth, but in a documentary form (ibid. ver. 38)—a formal deed being drawn out, to which the princes, Levites, and priests appended their seals, and which was no doubt laid up in the national archives. First Nehemiah, as Governor, affixed his seal; then "Zadok the scribe" (Zidkijah), by whom the document had been drawn up;[3] then the heads of the priestly families, each appending the seal of his house; next, the chief Levites, doing the same; finally, the "princes," or heads of important families, to the

[1] 2 Kings xxiii. 3; 2 Chr. xv. 12, xxix. 10, xxxiv. 31; Ezra x. 3.

[2] *A priori* this would be probable, considering Ezra's position. It is rendered more than probable by the resemblances between Neh. ix. 5–38 and Ezra ix. 6–15.

[3] Compare the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 455.

number of forty-four, some appending the seal in the name of the family, some in their own individual names (ibid. ch. x. 1–27). The seals appended numbered, altogether, eighty-four, and included those of all the personages of importance in the community; but, as the adhesion of every single member was desired, "all the rest of the people" who had attained to years of discretion, priests or laymen, male or female, were induced to "cleave to their brethren," and to bind themselves by an oath and a curse "to walk in God's Law" thenceforth, and "to observe and do all the commandments of Jehovah their Lord, and His judgments, and His statutes" (ibid. vers. 28, 29).

To this general promise of obedience to the Law in all its various requirements, there seem to have been appended certain special protestations on particular points of religious observance, in respect of which there had recently prevailed a widespread neglect in the community. Among these were the old and vexed question of inter-marriage with the heathen (Neh. x. 30), the proper observance of the Sabbath and of the sabbatical year (ibid. ver. 31), the allowance, or non-allowance, of the practice of pledging the person (ibid.), the faithful payment of the first-fruits (ibid. vers. 35–37) and of the tithes, and the adequate support of the Temple service year after year by the voluntary offerings of the faithful (ibid. vers. 32–34). The people, in their highly-excited zeal, undertook "not to give" at all, under any circumstances, "their daughters unto the people of the land, nor take the daughters of the people of the land for their sons"; not to purchase wares of any kind brought into the land by foreigners for sale on the Sabbath-day; to leave the land free from cultivation every sabbatical year; to cease the practice of forcing into slavery insolvent debtors who had borrowed money on the security of their persons; to pay severally the third part of a shekel each year towards the service of the sanctuary; to supply wood for the Temple sacrifices; and themselves to *bring* the first-fruits and tithes year by year to Jerusalem, and there deliver them over into the hands of the priests and Levites. The subscription of the third part of a shekel to the Temple service, and the obligation of the wood-offering, appear to have been new obligations, outside the range of the Law, but thought to be necessary by Ezra and Nehemiah under existing circumstances. The need of the new imposts indi-

cates strongly—first, the general poverty, which had caused the revenue from voluntary offerings to shrink; and, secondly, the exhaustion of the wood supply from the districts round Jerusalem, and the necessity of sending further and further afield for the fuel which was continually needed to consume the sacrifices offered up in the Temple. A result of the new arrangement was, that the fourteenth day of the fifth month became "the Festival of the Wood-cutters";[1] and on that day in each year a train of offerers arrived from one part of the territory or another, laden with heavy burdens of wood, which they brought with them to the "Holy Mountain," and there deposited in the custody of the priests, to be a stock on which reliance might be placed for the ensuing year.

These various reforms—which, while in some respects they restricted the liberties and increased the burdens of the Judæan community, were yet of the highest advantage to it, by calling out its patriotism and waking up its religious zeal—must be assigned to the conjoint efforts of the two Hebrew leaders, who worked together in the most perfect harmony and agreement. The exact time which they occupied is uncertain; but it is on the whole most probable that they were begun and concluded within the space of a few months. The Book of Nehemiah is deficient in chronological notices; and, having been compiled from a number of distinct documents,[2] lends itself to various interpretations. Nehemiah's governorship lasted certainly for above twelve years (Neh. v. 14; xiii. 6); but during what portion of this time Ezra was associated with him cannot be determined. The evidence is rather against their having been companions for very long, and leads rather to the belief that, while Nehemiah resided permanently at the Jewish capital, Ezra was summoned to attend him and to take part in his work on particular occasions.

One such occasion brought him into a position of peculiar prominency. The city walls had been repaired, the gate-towers completed, and the gates hung in their places. Watches had been arranged and organized (Neh. vii. 3). A special captain of the guard had been appointed in Nehemiah's brother (ibid. ver. 2), to see to the safety of the town. Strict orders had been given that the gates should be shut and barred at sun-down,

[1] Josephus, "Bell. Jud." ii. 17, § 6.

[2] See "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 425–427.

and not opened in the morning "until the sun was hot" (ibid. ver. 3). And now the time was come when, everything having been established in its rightful order, it seemed fitting that there should be a solemn dedication of the wall to Almighty God. It was not the Temple only which was viewed as a sanctuary by the more religious Jews; but the entire city was regarded as holy—as "God's mountain" (Isa. lxv. 25)—as a sort of outer sanctuary guarding the inner sanctuary, and, therefore, as requiring to be set apart to God by a formal act of consecration. On the day appointed for this important ceremony, Nehemiah arranged two grand processions, which should girdle the city on the right hand and on the left, and, meeting together at the Temple, should there sing praise to God, and "offer great sacrifices, and rejoice" (Neh. xii. 43). The Levites were summoned from their country districts, with their full array of the musical instruments, which still bore the name of their royal inventor, David (ibid. ver. 36); and the minstrels gathered themselves together from their retreats in the hills of Judah and in the deep valley of the Jordan[1] (ibid. vers. 28, 29). The priests came in their full numbers, carrying the sacred trumpets (ibid. vers. 35, 41), and the princes of Judah mustered in great strength (ibid. vers. 31, 32, 40). Nehemiah divided the assembled multitude into "two great companies of them that gave thanks," and placing himself at the head of the one company (ibid. ver. 40), and "Ezra the scribe" (ibid. ver. 36) at the head of the other, caused them to ascend the wall and make the circuit of it, part going in one direction and part in the other, rejoicing all the way and giving praise, until they met on the eastern rampart opposite the Temple, and, there taking their stand, brought the ceremony to an end by a loud antiphonal pæan of praise, in which the priests blew their trumpets, the Levites sounded their harps, cymbals, and psalteries, and the singers, "with Jerahiah their overseer" (ibid. ver. 42), "sang loud" and "with great joy rejoiced" (ibid. vers. 42, 43). At the same time, even the women and children joined in the general acclamation, so that "the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (ibid. ver. 43). Ezra and Nehemiah, each at the head of their own half of the procession, stood facing one the other, set before the nation as their almost co-equal guides and rulers, to be alike venerated and alike obeyed.

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 129.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact connected with Ezra's high position under the governorship of Nehemiah, is the way in which he casts Eliashib, the high priest of the time, altogether into the shade. On Nehemiah's arrival at Jerusalem, Eliashib appears as a personage of importance in the state, and one whom Nehemiah treats with high respect. To him is assigned the task of initiating the restoration of the wall (Neh. iii. 1), and the initial consecration, which is thought necessary, is effected by him. But from the time of Ezra's entrance upon the scene, Eliashib disappears ; he takes no part in the celebration of the Tabernacles' feast, or in the proclamation of a day of fasting, or in the ceremonies of that day, or in the renewal of the covenant, or in the final dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. In all these proceedings his place is taken by Ezra, who acts as if he were the highest ecclesiastical authority, which, however, he cannot really have been. The explanation would seem to be that Nehemiah, finding, after a time, that Eliashib's policy was altogether antagonistic to his own (Neh. xiii. 4–9, 28), declined to allow him any part in the elaboration or establishment of his reforms, and used the services of Ezra, who occupied a position analogous to that of a court chaplain under a Christian sovereign, instead. Ezra's conduct in taking Eliashib's place was at variance with ordinary ecclesiastical propriety, but may be regarded as justified under the circumstances of Eliashib's unfaithful, or at any rate, imprudent, dallying with heathenism.

CHAPTER VI.

LITERARY LABOURS.

Works to be assigned to Ezra—His authorship, wholly or in part, of the Book that bears his name—His contribution to the Book of Nehemiah—His probable authorship of Chronicles—Style of Ezra—Literary merit of Chronicles—Ezra's work in connection with the Canon of Scripture—His probable introduction of the "square" character—His origination of the Great Synagogue—His origination of the local synagogue system—Account of the system.

WE have spoken of Ezra as a literary student. The time has now arrived for considering him as an author, an editor, and a teacher. It is allowed on all hands that a portion of the Book which bears his name is his composition, since it is written in the first person (Ezra vii. 28; viii. 1, 15, 16, 17, 21, &c.; ix. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, &c.), and personation of one writer by another was unknown at the time to which the Book of Ezra must be ascribed. The separating school of German critics refuse, however, to admit that the entire work is from Ezra's pen, maintaining that it contains distinct traces of two, if not even of three, hands.[1] The most marked of these traces is the transition from he third to the first person in ch. vii.; and, again, the transition from the first person to the third in the beginning of ch. x. One English writer[2] even goes beyond the German "separators," ascribing ch. i. to Daniel, ch. ii. to Nehemiah, chs. iii.–vi. to Haggai, and to Ezra chs. vii.–x. Jewish tradition, on the other hand, ascribed the entire Book unhesitatingly to Ezra alone;[3]

[1] So De Wette, Bertheau, Winer, and others.

[2] Bishop Arthur Hervey. (See his article on "The Book of Ezra," in the "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. pp. 606–608.

[3] See "Baba Bathra," fol. 14, c. 2.

and it is quite possible that the whole may be his. He may have collected the documents and traditions which constitute the first part (chs. i.–vi.), and have been the original author of the second (chs. vii.–x.). A marked uniformity of style runs through the Book;[1] the same phrases continually recur; there is the same accuracy, the same inclination to insert documents, the same constant mention of the Levites, the same knowledge of two languages—Hebrew and Chaldean—the same mode of designating the Almighty, the same exactness with respect to dates, and the like. Or "Ezra" may have been compiled by some one who was not Ezra—*e.g.*, by Malachi; but, in that case, its constituent parts had probably, all of them, passed previously through Ezra's hands.

The Book of Nehemiah embodies a document which was, in all probability, originally composed by Ezra.[2] This is the long address to the Almighty in ch. ix. (vers. 5–38), which was delivered in the name of the people, immediately before the "sealing of the covenant," by two companies of Levites, chaunting with a loud voice; and in which many resemblances may be perceived to the tone of thought and modes of expression used in the admitted prayer of Ezra in his own Book (ch. ix. 6–15). This solemn form of words, composed for the occasion, would naturally be the work of the chief ecclesiastical authority of the time, whom we have already shown to have been, practically, Ezra,[3] since Eliashib, the high priest, was under a cloud, and distrusted by Nehemiah.

But the greatest literary achievement of Ezra, if we may be allowed to regard it as his, was the composition of the important and extensive work known to the Jews as "*Dibrey hay-yamim*," and represented in our Authorized Version by "the two Books of Chronicles." Ezra's authorship of Chronicles is maintained by the entire array of Hebrew authorities, and, though disputed by the greater number of modern critics,[4] has arguments of great weight in its favour. The resemblance between the style of Chronicles and the style of the Book of Ezra is very striking, and extends to those portions of the latter Book which are almost universally allowed to be from Ezra's hand.[5] Many

[1] See "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 387, note.
[2] So Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 146. [3] See above, p. 52.
[4] As Ewald, Stanley, De Wette, Zunz, and others.
[5] See "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 158, note 4.

of the best scholars hold that the two works were originally one; and the identity of 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23 with Ezra i. 1, 2, seems best accounted for by supposing that some uncertainty prevailed in the Jewish schools as to where the severance should be made between them. The general tone and spirit of the two Books is similar. In both what has been called "the Levitical spirit" is dominant; the externals of religion are held in high account; the Temple and the Temple worship are all-important; great stress is laid on the proper maintenance of the priests and Levites, the regular establishment of the "courses," and the rightful distribution of the several ministrations of the Temple among the Levitical families. A strong desire is shown to put on record the names of the priests and Levites employed in the ceremonies that come under notice, and no opportunity is neglected of doing honour to the Levitical order. Those who will not allow that the author of Chronicles is Ezra, are obliged to ascribe portions of the Book of Ezra, in which the generality of critics most distinctly see his hand, to "the Chronicler."[1]

The purity of Ezra's style as a writer is generally admitted. "It is elevating to see," says Ewald,[2] "how forcible and how beautiful the Hebrew idiom still appears for general purposes in the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah." Simplicity and directness are the main characteristics; but there are places where the composition rises into eloquence, and is entitled to our admiration. The following are stirring passages, possessing much literary merit:—

"And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord after the ordinance of David, king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel: and all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. pp. 145, 147, 165, &c.
[2] Ibid., p. 182.

the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off" (Ezra iii. 10–13).

"And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonied. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonied until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and said—O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face unto Thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are bondsmen; yet our Lord God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Thy commandments, which Thou hast commanded by Thy servants the prophets, saying, The land unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now, therefore, give not your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace nor their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou, our God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break Thy

commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations, wouldest Thou not be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before Thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before Thee because of this" (ibid. ix. 3–15).

"Thou didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red Sea, and shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land; for Thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst Thou get Thee a name, as it is this day. And Thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors Thou threwest into the deep, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover, Thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. Thou camest down also upon Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and madest known unto them Thy holy sabbath, and commandedest them precepts, statutes, and laws by the hand of Moses Thy servant; and gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land, which Thou hadst sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Thy commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of Thy wonders which Thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage; but Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and forsookest them not" (Neh. ix. 9–17).

"*Dibrey hay-yamim*" is a far more ambitious effort than the brief "Memoirs" in which Ezra embodied his recollections of his own first visit to Jerusalem, together with a sketch of the previous history of the returned emigrants, who "came with Zerubbabel." It is a work of great research, of wide scope, and of most careful execution. The author has ransacked all the documentary sources accessible to him. Not only has

he consulted the State Archives compiled by the Court his toriographers of the several reigns, but he has studied the more copious works of which the State Archives were abridgments; as for instance, "The Acts of Samuel the Seer," "The Acts of Nathan the Prophet," "The Acts of Gad the Seer" (1 Chron. xxix. 29), "The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite," "The Visions of Iddo the Seer" (2 Chron. ix. 29), "The Acts of Shemaiah the Prophet," "Iddo the Seer on Genealogies" (ibid. xii. 15), "The Commentary of the Prophet Iddo" (ibid. xiii. 22), "The Acts of Jehu, the son of Hanani" (ibid. xx. 34), "The Commentary of the Book of the Kings" (ibid. xxiv. 27), Isaiah's "Acts of Uzziah" (ibid. xxvi. 22), "The Vision of Isaiah" (ibid. xxxii. 32), and "The Acts of Hosai," or "Of the Seers" (ibid. xxxiii. 19).[1] Nor has he limited himself to public documents. The genealogical records of great families have been laid under contribution, and most interesting information has been extracted from them with respect to the fortunes of particular tribes. Examples are the incidents of the slaughter of the sons of Ephraim by the Gittites (1 Chron. vii. 21; viii. 13); the account of the sons of Sheba, and their dominion in Moab (ibid. iv. 21, 22); the adventures of the sons of Simeon in Gedor and Mount Seir (ibid. vers. 39–43); the marriage of a Jewish prince with a "daughter of Pharaoh" (ibid. ver. 18); the identification of the "prince of Reuben" whom Tiglath-pileser carried away captive (ibid. v. 6); and the war of the Reubenites and Gadites with the Hagarites (ibid. vers. 10–22). The curious details with respect to this struggle "must have been drawn from contemporary documents, embodied probably in the genealogical records of Jotham and Jeroboam, while other records used by the compiler are as late as after the return from Babylon,"[2] such as 1 Chron. ix. 2–34. The work possesses a remarkable unity. "At first sight it might seem that there was something incongruous in the combination of a number of genealogies, such as occupy the first nine chapters of the First Book, with an historical narrative, such as forms the main subject of the entire remainder of the work. The genealogies, too, might seem to be thrown together by different hands, since some are carried down much later than others,

[1] See above, p. 6.

[2] Bishop Arthur Hervey in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 309.

while some are repeated with slight additions, as though from a later writer, who was more fully informed on the subject. But, on the whole, the indications of unity in the authorship greatly preponderate over those of diversity, and the attentive student will probably come to the conclusion that the entire work is from one and the same author. The genealogical tendency, which shows itself so strongly in the Introductory Section (1 Chron. i.–ix.), is remarkably characteristic of the writer, and continually thrusts itself into notice in the more purely historical portions of his narrative. Conversely, the more genealogical portion of the work is penetrated by the same spirit as animates the historical chapters, and moreover abounds with phrases characteristic of the writer."[1]

Ancient Hebrew tradition declares that Ezra was not only an author, but an editor. He is credited with a general settling of the Canon of the Old Testament, with "the restoring, correcting, and re-editing of the whole sacred volume according to the threefold arrangement of the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa, with the divisions of the *Pesukim*, or verses, the writing of the vowel points handed down by tradition from Moses, and the whole series of emendations known as the *Kĕri*,"[2] and inserted ordinarily in the margin of Hebrew Bibles. Modern critics regard this traditional view as exaggerated, but admit that the idea of collecting together the sacred Hebrew literature belongs to Ezra's time, and that a nucleus was then formed round which were gathered subsequently, by a natural gravitation, the various "Books" at present constituting the Hebrew Scriptures.[3] The formation of this nucleus is sometimes ascribed to Nehemiah (2 Mac. ii. 13), but we may properly look upon this tradition as signifying no more than that it was set forth by his authority. The actual collector of the sacred Books, their arranger and editor, could only be Ezra. The centre, and "kernel" of the collection was "the Law." On the Law Ezra had for long years expended his most diligent labour, his most careful thought, all the resources of his learning (Ezra vii. 6, 10, 14). He had probably, while at Babylon, collected the various copies of the Law brought with them from

[1] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. pp. 161, 162.

[2] Bishop Arthur Hervey in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 606.

[3] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. pp. 140–142.

Palestine by the exiles, and, when he took up his abode at Jerusalem, had further collated such copies as he found there, thus forming a text which we may well regard as the basis, at any rate, of that which our Hebrew Bibles now give us. The other Books which may reasonably be ascribed to his collection, and which we may believe him to have corrected and edited, are the Book of Joshua, attached to the Pentateuch in the Samaritan Version, the Books of the Kings, including those of Samuel, the earlier Prophets, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, a certain number of the Psalms, especially those traditionally ascribed to David, together with his own works—the Books of Ezra and Chronicles.

With respect to the language in which Ezra wrote, and the characters which he used, it is to be remarked, in the first place, that he was familiar with two tongues, as his writings show us—the Hebrew, and the Syriac or Chaldee. He uses the Hebrew language from the beginning of his Book to ch. iv. 7, inclusive; he employs the Chaldee from ch. iv. 8, to ch. vi. 18; he then returns to the Hebrew, and uses it during the remainder of the Book, except for the letter of Artaxerxes (ch. vii. 12–26). According to the general Hebrew tradition,[1] which is supported by Origen[2] and Jerome,[3] the character in which he wrote was that *square* one, in which Hebrew books are now printed, and which has been certainly used for all Hebrew manuscripts from the date of the Christian era. The character is called by the Jews indifferently *mĕrubba'*, "square," and *ashshûrîth*, "Assyrian"; and the simplest and most ordinary explanation of the latter term is, that it meant "Babylonian," Babylonia being considered a part of Assyria,[4] and that it was given to the writing because Ezra brought it from Babylon. The Assyrians and Babylonians had certainly from a tolerably remote date a cursive character and writing not very different in its general appearance from the square Hebrew,[5] and it is quite possible that by Ezra's time this cursive writing had assumed a form not very remote from that with which we are

[1] "Talmud Jerus.," *Megillah*, fol. 71; "Talmud Babylon.," *Sanhed.* fol. 21, 2; 22, 1. [2] "Comment. in Ezram," ix. 4; "Hexapla," i. 86.

[3] "Prolog. Gal. in Libr. Reg."

[4] Herod. i. 106, 178; 2 Kings xxiii. 29.

[5] Layard, "Nineveh and its Remains," vol. ii. pp. 165, 166.

now familiar. Ezra may have made certain alterations in it, and so have come to be regarded as its author or inventor; but we ourselves should be disposed to assign to him no more than the first introduction of the character into Palestine, and the first application of it to the sacred volume. It has been conjectured that the motive for making the change was "the desire to have an additional mark of distinction from the Samaritans,"[1] who for their sacred books—the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua — retained the old Phœnico-Hebræan letters; but this explanation seems forced, and it is at least as likely that Ezra's action was determined by the simple fact, that, to the Hebrews of his day who could read, the square cursive character was far more familiar and intelligible from their long stay in Babylonia, than the archaic letters of the Phœnician type. He would wish to facilitate the study of the Law, and of the other Books which formed his "collection," and would therefore cause his copies to be made in the character best known to those who were likely to be students.

Besides these labours of a purely literary character, Jewish tradition assigns to Ezra the origination of certain institutions, which had for their object either the general direction of religion, or its systematic inculcation upon the people. For the former of these purposes was instituted, we are told, "the Great Synagogue," an assembly of one hundred and twenty members under the presidency of Ezra himself, who assisted him in his literary labours, organized and established the feast of Purim as a national observance, arranged the services to be used in the various "houses of God" which now sprang up in all parts of the land (Psa. lxxiv. 8), and issued decrees on religious subjects, which came to be more regarded than even the precepts of the Law itself.[2] Indications of the existence of this body in Ezra's time are thought to be found in the Book of Nehemiah, particularly in ch. viii. 13, and ch. x. 32–39; and it is certainly clear that Ezra had a body of counsellors who advised him in matters of religion, though contemporary evidence is wanting as to their number, as well as with respect to their powers, duties, and method of appointment. This body of counsellors was probably the germ out of which the "Great Synagogue" grew; and the later Sanhedrim was probably a revival in Greco-Macedonian

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 143.

[2] Dean Plumptre in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. p. 1402.

times of the earlier "Great Synagogue," which after a time had died out.

For the systematic inculcation of religion upon the people at large, Ezra seems to have devised the local synagogue system, which is so striking a feature of the later Jewish Church, as exhibited to us in the New Testament. Some administration of the system may be detected in the history of the kingdom of Israel, after its separation from that of Judah (2 Kings iv. 23), and something of the kind must also have existed after the Captivity in the various lands to which the Jews were carried by their conquerors; but to Ezra probably belongs the introduction into Judæa itself of local synagogues—places of worship distinct from the Temple—spread widely over the land, and thus multiplying almost indefinitely the centres of religious influence, whence instruction flowed to the people. Before the Captivity Jerusalem had been the one and only centre of religious life and knowledge—the people were expected to go up three times a year to Jerusalem, there to have their religious life quickened and intensified; but if they did not go up, if they remained at home, as we may be sure that too many of them did, then there was no provision for arousing them, or instructing them, or bringing them to a sense of their religious duties, except occasionally and spasmodically. Now and then good kings, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah, sent special missions from the capital to the various provincial towns and villages, to stir up the religious life of the people, and to give them much-needed instruction (2 Kings xxiii. 8–21; 2 Chron. xvii. 7–9; xxx. 1–12) But vastly different from this was the establishment, over the length and breadth of the land, of these local centres of teaching, with their official staff, their regular stated meetings, their set forms of prayers, their systematic reading of the Scriptures, their psalmody and hymnody, their exposition of God's Word, and their power of excommunication. "It is hardly possible to over-estimate the influence of the system thus developed. To it we may ascribe the tenacity with which . . . . the Jews adhered to the religion of their fathers, and (after the return from the Captivity) never again relapsed into idolatry. The people were now in no danger of forgetting the Law, and the external ordinances that hedged it round. If pilgrimages were still made to Jerusalem at the set feasts, the habitual religion of the Jews, in and yet more out of Palestine,

was connected much more intimately with the synagogue than with the Temple."[1]

The establishment of the system involved, in the first place, the erection in every town and city throughout the whole land, of a decent building to be set apart for holy uses, known as a "house of God" or "synagogue of God," or "place of prayer" (τόπος προσευχῆς). The size of the building varied according to the population. It had no fixed dimensions or proportions, but it stood commonly on the most lofty eminence in or near the city to which it belonged, or, failing this, was rendered conspicuous by a tall pole which rose from the roof and naturally attracted attention. And its direction was fixed and determinate. "The synagogue was in all cases so constructed that the worshippers as they entered, and as they prayed, looked towards Jerusalem."[2] The internal arrangements followed the type of the Tabernacle. "At the upper, or Jerusalem, end stood the Ark—the chest, which, like the older and more sacred Ark, contained the Book of the Law. It gave to that end the name and character of a 'sanctuary.' This part of the synagogue was actually the place of honour. Here were the 'first seats,' after which Pharisees and Scribes in later times strove so eagerly (Matt. xxiii. 6), to which the wealthy and honoured worshipper was invited (James ii. 2, 3). Here too, in front of the Ark, still representing the type of the Tabernacle, was the eight-branched lamp, lighted only on the greater festivals. Besides this, there was one lamp kept burning perpetually. Others, brought by devout worshippers, were lighted at the beginning of the Sabbath. A little further towards the middle of the building was a raised platform, on which several persons could stand at once; and in the middle of this rose a pulpit, in which the Reader stood to read the lesson or sate down to teach. The congregation were divided, men on one side, women on the other, a low partition five or six feet high, running between them. Within the Ark, as above stated, were the rolls of the sacred books. The rollers round which they were wound were often elaborately decorated, and the cases for them embroidered or enamelled, according to their material. As part of the fittings we have also to note another chest for the *Haphtaroth*, or rolls of the Prophets; alms-boxes at or near the door, after the

[1] Dean Plumptre in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. p. 1398.
[2] Vitringa, "De Synagogis," pp. 178, 457.

pattern of those at the Temple, one for the poor of Jerusalem, the other for local charities; notice-boards, on which were written the names of offenders who had been 'put out of the synagogue;' and a chest for the trumpets and other musical instruments, used at the New Years, Sabbaths, and other festivals."[1]

The buildings had to be placed under the care and direction of special officers; and here the most remarkable point in the arrangement was, that no special functions or position was assigned to members of the hereditary priesthood. "The services of the synagogue required no sons of Aaron, and gave them nothing more than a complimentary precedence."[2] Each locality appointed its own officers. These were, generally, (1) a body of laymen, called "Elders," or "Pastors," who had the general care of the building and services, and were presided over by one of their number, called the Archisynagogos, or "Ruler of the Synagogue;"[3] (2) the *Shellach*, or "deputy," the officiating minister, who acted as the delegate of the congregation, and was the chief reader of the prayers, &c., which he offered up in their name; (3) the *Chazzan*, or "attendant," who had duties of a lower kind, who kept the building clean, opened the doors, and made things ready for service; and (4) the ten *Batlanim*, or "men of leisure," who undertook to be present at all services, so that a congregation might never be wanting, and who acted probably in most cases as collectors of the alms of the faithful.[4] The governing power belonged to the Elders alone. With their head, the Archisynagogos, they formed a kind of Chapter, managed the affairs of the synagogue, and possessed the power of excommunicating.

The services arranged for the synagogues consisted of prayer, praise, the reading of God's Word, and the exposition of it. Set forms of prayer were established by ecclesiastical authority —originally, no doubt, by Ezra—and these were required to be recited regularly, after a formal fixed order, on every day of the week. Among the prayers were interspersed psalms, hymns, and blessings. The psalms and hymns might be varied, but the *Shemoneh Ezreh*, the eighteen fixed prayers and benedic-

[1] "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii., pp. 1398, 1399. [2] Ibid., p. 1398.
[3] Luke viii. 41–49; xiii. 14; Acts xviii. 8, 17.
[4] "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. p. 1399.

tions of the Liturgy, were rigorously required on all occasions.[1] The hours of service were the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour. A portion of the Law was read as the first lesson on each Sabbath day; and these lessons were so arranged that the entire Law was read through, according to the practice at first established, in three years, according to the later usage, in one year.[2] The writings of the Prophets were read as second lessons in a corresponding order. The ruler of the synagogue, or the president for the day, handed the respective rolls of the Law or the Prophets to any member of the congregation whom he chose, and required him to read the prescribed passage. On the reading followed the *Derash*, or "Exposition"—an extempore comment by the reader on the passage read by him (Luke iv. 16–27). Prayers both preceded and followed the reading and exposition; the attitude for prayer was standing, and not kneeling; sometimes the arms were raised, and as it were stretched out to heaven; at the end of each prayer and benediction the congregation responded with a loud "Amen"; when the Ter-Sanctus hymn of Isaiah (chap. vi.) was sung, the worshippers sprang up from the ground three times, "as though they would rise with their prayers to heaven itself."[3] At the close of each Sabbath a feast was held in the synagogue, whereat bread and fruits were consumed and a cup of wine passed round.

It is impossible to determine how far these observances, in all their elaborate details, belonged to the time of Ezra. Undoubtedly the ritual of the synagogue, at its first institution, was far simpler than it ultimately became; but what particular parts of it had Ezra for their author, and what were of later development, we can only conjecture. Still we may be tolerably certain that the didactic functions of the synagogue were contemplated in Ezra's scheme and provided for under his direction. "The scribe of the Law of the God of heaven" (Ezra vii. 12), whose special object it was "to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (ibid. ver. 10), can certainly not have failed to require the reading of the Law in any "house of God" that he set up; and it was clearly his practice with the reading of God's Word to couple its exposition (Neh. viii. 3–8). He

[1] Jost, "Geschichte Judenthums," vol. ii. pp. 36, 45.
[2] Plumptre in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. p. 1400.
[3] Clem. Alex., "Stromata," vii. 40.

probably intended the synagogues to be, primarily and especially, preaching-houses, places where the Law should be read and explained to the people and spiritual instruction given to them. The pious instincts of the people may have added the prayers and the praises, the psalmody and the hymnody, the blessings and the doxologies; or these too may have been arranged by Ezra in a simple form and afterwards, as time went on, elaborated. The growth of the synagogue system between the time of Ezra and that of the Gospel narrative is a matter on which scarcely any information has come down to us; but its value and influence for good on the Jewish community are beyond all question, and there can be no reasonable doubt that for the blessings which it conferred upon them, the Jews were indebted mainly to the zeal and foresight of the wise ruler and purdent reformer—Ezra.

CHAPTER VII.

LATER LIFE, DEATH, AND CHARACTER.

Scantiness of the materials for Ezra's later life—Probably passed at Jerusalem—Position and occupations—Possible contact with Malachi—Probable date of death—Magnificence of his funeral—Estimate of his work and character.

THE last distinct notice of Ezra contained in Holy Scripture is the account of the part which he took with Nehemiah in the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. xii. 27–43). This event belongs probably to the year B.C. 432, when Ezra would, according to our calculations,[1] have attained the age of (at least) sixty-three years. It has been supposed that about this time he either died or returned to Babylon;[2] but trustworthy data are absolutely wanting for the Jewish history between B.C. 431 and B.C. 336; and the few traditions which have come down to us with respect to Ezra's later years are so vague and so contradictory that any account which can now be attempted of them must be in the main conjectural. Josephus is probably our best authority, and his statement that Ezra lived to a good old age in Jerusalem, and died there, and was honoured with a magnificent funeral,[3] seems to deserve more credit than the Mohammedan traditions, which place his tomb in Lower Babylonia, at or near Bussorah. Moslem stories with regard to Old Testament saints are seldom of much value; and we can as little rely on the account, first reported by Benjamin of Tudela,[4] of

[1] See above, p. 13.

[2] Bishop Arthur Hervey in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 606.

[3] Josephus, "Ant. Jud.," xi. 5, § 5.

[4] See the "Travels of Benjamin of Tudela," ed. Bohn, p. 93.

Ezra's Mesopotamian burial-place, as on the modern beliefs that Jonah is buried on the site of the ancient Nineveh,[1] Daniel at Sus or Susa,[2] and Ezekiel at Kerbela.[3] The supposed tomb of Ezra is said to be manifestly "an ancient and splendid synagogue building,"[4] to which the name of Ezra was attached without either authority or plausibility, since Bussorah is quite out of the line by which travellers would proceed from Jerusalem to Babylon, or Susa, or Ecbatana.

Ezra therefore, we may assume, passed his later life in the country of his adoption, and chiefly at the city which had been the scene of his principal labours, Jerusalem. He may, like Nehemiah (Neh. xiii. 6), have visited the Persian Court from time to time; but his heart was with the Palestinian community, where the new institutions which he had set up required his constant care and superintendence. He wrote his Book of Chronicles, probably, towards the close of his long life, perhaps between B.C. 420 and B.C. 410, when his age would have been between seventy-five and eighty-five. His other works had been completed earlier. He presided over the Council—the traditional "Great Synagogue"—which he had invented or resuscitated, guided its deliberations, and, when it acted judicially, pronounced its decisions. He continued no doubt, so far as his strength permitted, to read and expound the Law, teaching in Israel "statutes and judgments" (Ezra vii. 10). The Hagiocracy was developed under his direction and influence. While the powers of the high priest were somewhat narrowed, that official having to confine himself almost wholly to the superintendence of the Temple and the Temple service, the priests and Levites were assigned important duties, the Law was established as supreme, and the (practically) new order of scribes was called into being and advanced to a position of great authority and dignity. "The scribes and Pharisees" at a later date were said to "sit in Moses' seat" (Matt. xxiii. 2), and the foundations of their greatness were certainly laid by Ezra. From Ezra's time their regular ministry took the place of the occasional ministry of the prophets, and the later Judaism took its shape mainly from them.

[1] Layard, "Nineveh and Babylon," pp. 596, 597.
[2] Loftus, "Chaldæa and Susiana," pp. 317, 338, &c.
[3] Ibid. pp. 33–36.
[4] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 164.

Ezra's death is generally assigned to about the year B.C. 432 or 431. But this notion is a mere conjecture based upon Nehemiah's silence with respect to him in his thirteenth chapter. Now the argument *a silentio* is always weak, and in this instance it can at the utmost only prove, not that Ezra was dead, but that he was absent from Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah's latest recorded reforms. This may have been so, and yet he may have returned subsequently and have continued to live there for several years longer. The statement of Josephus that he "died an old man" is more consonant with a lifetime of seventy-five or eighty years than with one of sixty-three. And a space of time is wanted for the accomplishment of those labours of composition and organization which even recent critics assign to him. We should incline, therefore, to give for the approximate date of Ezra's death B.C. 420–410.

But this extension of his lifetime, if it be allowed, will bring the Great Scribe into contact with a new and important personage. There is reason to believe that Malachi, the last of the prophets—"the Seal," as the Rabbis called him—commenced his ministry at Jerusalem about the year B.C. 430, or between that date and B.C. 420.[1] He was thus, perhaps, contemporary with Ezra, and a sharer in his work for ten or fifteen years. The two must have been in close sympathy. Malachi was equally opposed with Ezra to the prevalent intermarriages between the Jews and the heathen (Mal. ii. 11), often brought about by a previous wrongful divorce of their faithful Jewish consorts (ibid. vers. 14–16) by unfaithful husbands. He denounced especially the "corruption of the covenant of Levi" by priests who took foreign wives (ibid. ver. 8; comp. Neh. xiii. 29), whom he viewed as especially guilty, just as Ezra did (Ezra x. 19). He protested, as Ezra had done (Neh. x. 32–39), against the dishonest withholding by the people of tithes and offerings that were due (Mal. iii. 8), and upheld the claim of the priests and Levites to full payment of all their legal dues (ibid. ver. 10). But Malachi went much beyond Ezra in the prophetic power and spirit. He "looked over the silent waste of years that was to follow him, unbroken by any distinct prophetic utterance,"[2]

[1] Curiously enough, some of the Jewish writers identified Malachi with Ezra, regarding the former term as a mere epithet—"the messenger of Jehovah."

[2] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. pp. 156, 157.

and he saw in the remote distance the great day of the Lord (ibid. iv. 5), when "the Sun of Righteousness should arise with healing in His wings" (ibid. ver. 2)—the "Angel of the Covenant"—the Lord Himself—should "suddenly come to His temple," and "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver" (ibid. iii. 1–3). "This was to be the moment," as our latest historian of Israel eloquently says,[1] "of the unexpected sifting and dividing of the essential from the unessential, the worthless from the valuable. It was to be like the furnace in which the precious metals are cleansed; it was to be like the tank in which the fullers beat and washed out the clothes of the inhabitants of Jerusalem; it was to be like the glorious yet terrible uprising of the Eastern sun, which should wither to the very roots the insolence and the injustice of mankind; but as its rays extended, like the wings of the Egyptian Sun-god, should by its healing and invigorating influences call forth the good from their obscurity, prancing and bounding like the young cattle in the burst of spring, and treading down under their feet the dust and ashes to which the same bright sun had burnt up the tangled thicket of iniquitous dealing." These revelations, if known to Ezra, as they probably were, must have been inexpressibly elevating and cheering. They must have consoled the aged saint, weary with his continual and seemingly hopeless struggle against evil,[2] by assuring him of the ultimate triumph of good, the certain coming of a day when wrong and oppression would be put down, and righteousness be established, and reconciliation be made between God and man, and all nations be blessed in Israel (ibid. iii. 12).

If the death of Ezra took place between B.C. 420 and B.C. 410, it would fall into the reign of Darius the Second, the "Darius Nothus" of the Greeks, a son of Artaxerxes Longimanus, by one of his concubines. This prince, who ascended the Persian throne in B.C. 425 and reigned till B.C. 405, appears to have made no change in the system on which Judæa was governed (Mal. i. 8), and is not unlikely to have continued Nehemiah in office to the end of his life. Judæa remained tranquil during this period, though Egypt was meditating revolt; and thus the closing years of the aged scribe would be passed in peace and

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 158.

[2] See Nehem. xiii. 3–28.

quietness, safeguarded by his old and tried friend, the Governor, and cheered by the last dying gleams of prophecy. That Ezra retained the respect and good opinion of his countrymen to the end of his days, is indicated by the tradition that he was buried "in a magnificent manner,"[1] since such funerals were very uncommon among the Israelites. Nehemiah and the "princes" probably vied with each other in doing him honour, and perhaps "made a great burning for him," as his sorrowing people did for Asa (2 Chron. xvi. 14). Local tradition does not associate the name of Ezra with any one of the many tombs in the vicinity of Jerusalem, but it is just possible that he found his last resting-place in one of the twenty-seven *loculi* in the noted "Tomb of the Prophets," which is still to be seen on the western flank of Olivet.[2]

It is not easy to sum up in a few words the character and work of Ezra. He comes before us in so many capacities, and is revealed to us in such brief and hurried flashes, that we can with difficulty form any distinct conception of his personality. He was student, critic, linguist, antiquary, historian, teacher and preacher, judge, governor, reformer of a religious system, second founder of a political community. We cannot call him a person of brilliant genius, or of great originality; but yet we have to acknowledge in him one of the born leaders of men, one of those who have exercised upon the world a vast influence, and an influence almost wholly for good. Later Judaism—the Judaism of Maccabean times — which was the leaven that leavened the world and made the acceptance of Christianity possible, derived all that was best in it from him—its zeal, its fervent patriotism, its passionate attachment to the Law, its burning desire to keep itself unpolluted from the impure idolatries and debasing superstitions of heathenism. Ezra gave to the later Judæan community that stubbornness and strength which enabled it to resist and overcome the persecuting Hellenism of Antiochus, and to battle for years on almost equal terms with the mighty legions of Rome. Ezra's exaltation of the Law, and earnest propagation of it, and provision for its continued propagation by his system of synagogues, together with his "fierce exclusiveness" and stern rejection of the heathen element that was creeping into the nation, was mainly instrumental in keep-

[1] Josephus, "Ant. Jud.," xi. 5, § 5.

[2] Fergusson in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. p. 1531.

ing alive that spirit of exclusive patriotism and uncompromising zeal,[1] which carried the people through five centuries of struggle and difficulty. He had impressed upon the nation, or at any rate upon the better part of it, his own individuality. His spirit lived, not only in the Maccabean chieftains, but in the rough "Zealots" who fought with such desperate tenacity against the legions of Titus in defence of the walls which he had consecrated (Neh. xii. 27–43). It may be true that his aims were "narrow" and his methods "rigid."[2] But he achieved a great success. He reanimated the drooping spirits of his countrymen and filled them with a new enthusiasm. He turned a few weak bands of despondent exiles into a vigorous and energetic people. Doubtless he was helped in the performance of his task by a powerful friend and coadjutor, the brave strong-minded Nehemiah. But the merit of the work accomplished, and its enduringness, were due to him rather than his colleague, since he at once personally inaugurated the reforms (Ezra ix., x.), and by his institutions secured their continuance.

In temperament Ezra was passionate and emotional. Shame paralyzed his tongue and probably suffused his face, when he thought to what reproach he would lay himself open if, after boasting that God's protection was all-sufficient, he should stoop to ask the Persian king for an escort of troops to defend him from "the enemy in the way" (ibid. viii. 22). Consternation seized him when he first heard of the people's sin in the matter of the mixed marriages. "When I heard this thing," he said, "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonied" (ibid. ix. 3)—"I sat astonied until the evening sacrifice" (ibid. ver. 4). At last, rising from his sitting posture, and falling on his bended knees, and stretching out his open hands to heaven, with what a burst of agony did he pour forth his impassioned prayer to the God whose Law had been transgressed, and his emotion increasing, break into a flood of tears (ibid. x. 1), thrilling into sympathy all those who saw and heard him! How deep must have been the grief which could not even thus vent itself, but led on to a three days' mourning and retirement in one of the Temple chambers, and to a complete abstinence during that space from all food, even from bread and water![3] There is a warmth in

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 122.

[2] Ibid. pp. 117, 137, 138.

[3] See Ezra x. 6; and compare Stanley, vol. iii. p. 129.

his devotions, a depth and fervour in his sympathy with his countrymen, which reveals to us one of those ardent natures, far commoner in the East than among ourselves, but seldom even there carried to the pitch of intensity that appears to have been reached in this instance.

Ezra's faith in God is admirable. Amid all discouragements he clings to the "Unseen Support" of the Most High. Cheerfully he goes forth on his perilous journey, feeling that "the hand of the Lord his God is upon him" (ibid. vii. 6). Gratefully he acknowledges on reaching his journey's end, "I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me" (ibid. ver. 28). Boldly he declares to the Persian king—"The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him" (ibid. viii. 22). When no Levite will consent to accompany him among the exiles in Babylon, he does not despair, but makes fresh efforts which are attended with success, "because" (as he says) "of the good hand of our God upon us" (ibid. ver. 18). It is "the hand of God," which, he feels, delivers him and his company from "the enemy that lay in wait by the way' between Ahava and Jerusalem (ibid. ver. 31). When the terrible sin of the people in respect of the mixed marriages is brought before him, he flies at once to God for strength and support, and pleads with Him for the people's pardon with a fervour and an earnestness that make his prayer a model even for Christians (ibid. ix. 5–15).

It may be objected to Ezra's religion, that it is of a severe type, and tinged with asceticism. He certainly laid great stress upon fasting. When he was troubled with respect to the perils of the route that he had to traverse in order to reach Jerusalem from Ahava, he "proclaimed a fast," that he and his companions might "afflict themselves before God, to seek of Him a right way for themselves, their substance, and their little ones" (Ezra viii. 21); and he tells us that they "fasted, and besought God for this, and He was intreated of them" (ibid ver. 23). When the sin of the mixed marriages was first made known to him, he punished himself for the transgressions of the people by "plucking off the long tresses of his sacerdotal locks, and the long flakes of his sacerdotal beard,"[1] and abstaining from food the whole day. Again, after

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 119.

binding the faithful at Jerusalem by an oath to call together the whole nation within three days for the purpose of considering what should be done in the matter, he shut himself up in the chamber of Johanan, the high priest's son, till the day of the meeting, and "did eat no bread, neither drink water" (ibid. x. 6). Later on, when, in conjunction with Nehemiah, he caused the people solemnly to renew their covenant with God, we cannot doubt but that it was by his directions that they assembled themselves together "with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them" (Neh. ix. 1). Ezra had a deep sense of the awful majesty of God. He knew Him as "the Great, the Mighty, and the Terrible" (ibid. ver. 32). He exceedingly feared His chastisements, and His "fierce anger" (Ezra ix. 14; x. 14). But he did not fall into the error of seeing only the "severity of God" (Rom. xi. 22); he did not inculcate a religion of mere gloom and austerity. God was set forth in his teaching as One that spared and forgave (Ezra ix. 8, 9), One that punished men less than their iniquities deserved (ibid. ver. 13), One that was "ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Neh. ix. 17; comp. ver. 31), One that "kept covenant *and mercy*" (ibid. ver. 32). When the people in their penitence were bowed down by "overmuch sorrow," Ezra the priest, and the Levites by his direction, checked them with the words, "Mourn not, nor weep" (ibid. viii. 9). When a festival time came round, his exhortation was —"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (ibid. ver. 10). Thus we may recognize in the Great Scribe, the Great Reformer, the Second Founder of the Jewish state, one who held the balance even between a religion of gloom and a religion of light-heartedness, and who set forth God before men's eyes in His true character, as at once "good" and "severe" (Rom. xi. 22), merciful and just (ibid. ii. 4–10), a God of love (1 John iii. 1; iv. 8), and "a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29).

NEHEMIAH.

CHAPTER I

DESCENT AND PROBABLE BIRTHPLACE.

Nehemiah's tribe—His supposed descent from David—His probable birthplace, Susa—Position of Susa—Its ruins—Description of the Royal palace there, and its surroundings—Nehemiah's original position in Susa.

IT is gathered, with a near approach to certainty, from expressions dropped by Nehemiah in his narrative (Neh. i. 2; ii. 3), that he belonged to the tribe of Judah.[1] His deep attachment to Jerusalem would not, by itself, prove the fact; but his statement that that city was "the place of his fathers' sepulchres"—the place, *i.e.*, where his ancestors were buried—taken in conjunction with his strong affection, may be accepted as falling little short of actual proof. Tradition confirms the view,[2] and goes further, since it declares him to have been "of the seed of David."[3] It may be thought, perhaps, that the absence of any statement to this effect from the sacred narrative militates against the supposition of his having been entitled to claim so proud a descent;[4] but there is no great difficulty in imagining motives which may have inclined him to reticence. His humblemindedness (ibid. i. 6) alone might be sufficient reason;

[1] So Bp. Arthur Hervey in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 486, and Dr. Pope in Bp. Ellicott's "Old Testament Commentary," vol. iii. p. 483.

[2] Euseb.

[3] See Joh. Malalas, "Chronographia," vi. p. 160, ed. Bonn; and compare Carpzov, "Introductio," i. p. 339.

[4] So Ewald ("Hist. of Israel," vol. v. p. 148, E.T.).

and an even stronger one would be the support that such a claim would have lent to the most dangerous of the accusations made against him by his adversaries, viz., that his object in fortifying Jerusalem was to make himself a king (ibid. vi. 6). Still, the fact that his descent from David receives no support from any of the later Jewish writers, neither from the Son of Sirach, nor from the author of the Second Book of Maccabees, who is bent on glorifying him (2 Macc. i. 18–36), nor from Josephus, must be admitted to throw considerable doubt upon the tradition, which first appears in Eusebius and Jerome, writers of the fourth century after our era, and which has therefore no very strong claim on our acceptance. Nehemiah's father was a certain Hachaliah (Neh. i. 1 ; x. 1), of whom nothing further is known ; and he had a brother, Hanani (ibid. i. 2 ; vii. 2), in whom he placed great confidence. It has been remarked that names resembling Hanani and Nehemiah are found in the Davidic house.[1]

The probable birthplace of Nehemiah, and the scene, almost certainly, of his early life, was the great Persian, or, rather, Elamitic, city of Susa. Susa—"Shushan" in the Hebrew—was a city of a high antiquity, which for many centuries had been the capital of an important state, and had held a position little inferior to that of Nineveh or Babylon. It was situated between the Choaspes and Eulæus rivers, in a fertile plain, within sight of the Bakhtiyari mountains, about eighty miles east of the Tigris. The tract about it was highly favoured by nature. It was a stretch of undulating ground, belonging to the tertiary formation, in which beds of sandstone and gravel alternated, and which was clothed for a great part of the year with an abundant vegetation. In Susiana, "after the winter rains, which last from December till March, the entire surface of the ground puts on a livery of green, diversified with numerous brilliant flowers, and a rich pasturage is everywhere afforded to the flocks and herds of the inhabitants. The whole country is 'plentifully studded with green konar trees,'[2] with their bright red berries ; a species of oak is found in places which grows to the height of forty or fifty feet ; oleanders, with their delicate pink blossoms, fringe the courses of the streams ; while, occasionally, in a dried-up river-bed is seen a perfect

[1] "Dict. of the Bible," *l.s.c.*

[2] Loftus, "Chaldæa and Susiana," p. 293.

forest of tamarisk, poplar, and acacia, or a dense mass of date trees, konars, and jungle enshrouds and half conceals a building. Rare shrubs and fruit-bearing plants, strange to European eyes, diversify the scene; in places the air is heavy with the scent of orange and lemon trees; and the rich soil yields everywhere to the cultivator ample crops of corn, rice, grapes, melons, cucumbers, and indigo. The heat, though considerable, is not oppressive. In the distance can be seen the snow-clad range of the Bakhtiyari mountains, rising to an elevation of from 8,000 to 10,000 feet above the level of the sea, in a continuous undulating line void of peaks or of any prominent features, while the breeze which blows from them is almost always cool and refreshing. The temperature, as measured by the thermometer, is high, especially during the middle of the day, when the natives retire to their *serdaubs*, or underground apartments;" but, on the whole, the climate is spoken of as "delightful," the sun's heat being subdued or counteracted by "fresh invigorating breezes."[2]

Susa was a city of a considerable size. Its ruins at the present day consist of "four spacious artificial platforms, distinctly separated from each other."[3] The most elevated of these is towards the west, and is washed by the Shapur, a small stream, the green waters of which meander through a dense mass of vegetation. It attains a height of 119 feet above the river, and is believed to represent the ancient acropolis, or citadel. To the north of this is a square mass of ruins, about a thousand feet each way, which was certainly the site of the royal palace in Persian times. South-east of these two mounds, and much exceeding in size both of them put together, is the third or "great central platform,"[4] which attains an elevation of about seventy feet, and covers an area of sixty acres. These three together formed the Upper City, and appear to have been known as *Shushan-ha-birah*, "Susa the fortress," or "Susa the palace."[5] Further eastward, and at a lower level, are various irregular groups of ruins, and one extensive platform of comparatively slight elevation, which constituted the Lower

[1] See the author's "Biblical Topography," pp. 64, 65.

[2] Loftus, "Chaldæa and Susiana," p. 307.

[3] Ibid. p. 343.

[4] Ibid. p. 45.

[5] Birah בִּירָה has both meanings, the fact being that royal palaces were anciently always fortified.

town, and was inhabited probably by the poorer classes of the population.

There are considerable remains, even at the present day, of the ancient Persian palace. Its main feature was a great pillared hall, closely resembling, both in dimensions and ornamentation, the famous "Hall of Xerxes" at Persepolis,[1] whereof it was perhaps the model. A central phalanx of thirty-six columns, arranged in six rows of six each, supported probably a solid roof, and formed a "Throne Room" or "Hall of Audience," two hundred feet each way, "the largest interior of the ancient world, with the single exception of the great hall of Karnak, which covered 58,300 square feet, while this only extended to 40,000."[2] The pillars rose to a height which probably exceeded sixty feet, and were fluted from end to end, resting upon square bases, and crowned at the top with elaborate capitals resembling the Persepolitan. These consisted of four members, the first intended to represent the pendent leaves of the date-palm, the second an opening bud of the lotus flower, the third a series of volutes, but placed vertically, and not horizontally, and the fourth two demi-bulls, placed back to back, between whose necks passed the beams for the support of the roof. The pillars were slender, not much exceeding five feet in their diameter, while the spaces between them exceeded twenty-two feet, so that the entire apartment presented to the eye five aisles, or vistas, both longitudinally and laterally, having stone pillars on either side, a stone or marble pavement below, and a ceiling of wood above, probably divided into square compartments.

Outside this central phalanx, and distant from it about sixty-four feet, stood on three sides—west, south, and east—detached groups of twelve columns each, which were, no doubt, roofed over, like the central hall, and afforded sufficient shade and shelter for the needs of a climate in general so soft and equable. Whether any connection existed between the central and outer groups of columns is a question that has been much disputed, and one on which explorers and restorers of the edifice are at variance.[3] The fact is certain that no traces of

[1] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. iii. pp. 303–312.

[2] Fergusson in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. iii. p. 1302.

[3] Compare Mr. Fergusson's article on the architecture of Susa in Smith's "Dictionary" with Loftus, "Chaldæa and Susiana," pp. 374, 375.

such a connection, though carefully sought for, could be found; and the conclusion of those engaged in the search—"that the outer groups or porticoes stood distinct from the central square of columns, or connected simply by means of curtains"—seems to deserve acceptance, alike on the ground of actual examination and of antecedent fitness. "Nothing," as Mr. Loftus says, "could be more appropriate than this method at Susa and Persepolis, the spring residences of the Persian monarchs. It must be considered that these columnar halls were the equivalents of the modern throne-rooms, that here all public business was despatched, and that here the king might sit and enjoy the beauties of the landscape. With the rich plains of Susa or Persepolis before him, he could well, after his winter's residence at Babylon, dispense with massive walls, which would only check the warm fragrant breeze from those verdant prairies adorned with the choicest flowers. A massive roof, covering the whole expanse of columns, would be too cold and dismal, whereas curtains around the central group would serve to admit both light and warmth. Nothing can be conceived better adapted to the climate or the season."[1]

The employment of curtains in connection with the columns in the royal palace at Susa is distinctly noticed by the author of the Book of Esther. "Where," he says, "were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings, and pillars of marble" (Esther i. 6). From this testimony it appears that the curtains at Susa were parti-coloured, and so arranged by cords, rings, and (we may suppose) pulleys, that they could be either raised or lowered at pleasure, and could thus either intercept the light or admit it. Similarly, in the "throne-rooms" of modern Persia, curtains and awnings are extended in front of the windows and doorways, to screen the interior from over-curious eyes and to ward off the rays of the sun.[2]

The existing pavement at the Susa palace consists of slabs of a blue limestone;[3] but it is not continuous, and indeed exists only on the spots where it has supported the columns which sustained the roof. Elsewhere no pavement has been discovered; but we may gather from the Book of Esther that, in its original condition, the floor of the palace was as gorgeous

[1] Loftus, "Chaldæa and Susiana," p. 375.
[2] Layard, "Nineveh and Babylon," p. 649. [3] Loftus, p. 365.

and magnificent as its sides and roof, consisting of a pavement of many colours—green, and white, and pearl-coloured, and psotted or black,[1] laid out probably in squares of some considerable size, and arranged into patterns (Esther *l. s. c.*). On the pavement were scattered here and there couches, fauteuils, and sofas of solid silver, or in some instances of gold, adorned with rich stuffs of native or foreign manufacture,and no doubt so cushioned as to afford comfort and repose to the wearied limbs of those who were privileged to recline upon them.

The surroundings of the palace were also of more than usual beauty. The lofty mound on which it was built commanded a view almost unexampled for luxuriance and richness. Gardens and orchards clustered round the town and suburbs. Beyond was the rolling plain, here spread out in flowery pastures, there covered by golden seas of corn; towards the south was the low range of hills which stretches from Ahwaz westward; finally, towards the north, were the limestone ranges and snow-capped mountains of Luristan. Invigorating breezes from the lofty mountain-tops played around, tempering the sun's heat and making music in the feathery palms; the verdure of konars, acacias, poplars, tamarisks, refreshed the eye; the sound and sight of gushing waters gratified both eye and ear; even the sense of smell was not unsatisfied, for the rich vegetation of the verdant plains of Shush is "interspersed with plants of a sweet-scented and delicate iris"[2] (*Iris Sisyrinchium*)—the "lily," according to some, from which Susa derived its name.

There was a large Jewish community in Susa, as in so many of the Mesopotamian and Persian towns. When, in the reign of Xerxes, this community withstood the armed attack of its heathen enemies it slew of them no fewer than eight hundred.[3] We may conjecture from this that its number of adult males exceeded a thousand, which would imply a total population of from four to six thousand. The bulk of the heathen inhabitants of Susa were friendly to the Jews, felt their troubles as a "perplexity,"[4] and, when they prospered, "rejoiced and were glad."[5] Individual members of the community had been from time to time singled out for the royal favour; and the Susians probably retained in Nehemiah's day a lively recollection of the good

[1] Compare the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 476.
[2] Loftus, "Chaldæa and Susiana," p. 346.
[3] Esther ix. 6, 15. [4] Ibid. iii. 15. [5] Ibid. viii. 15.

Queen Esther and her powerful kinsman, Mordecai. Nehemiah would not be subject to contempt or ill-usage on account of his nationality. As he grew to manhood at Susa, he would at once enjoy the protection of his own community and the goodwill of the other inhabitants. What were the circumstances of his birth and bringing up we do not know; but we may assume perhaps from the high position whereto he ultimately attained, and from his evident fitness for it, that he belonged to the upper class of the community, received the ordinary education of a Jew of that class, and, even before he became attached to the Persian Court, held an honourable place among his countrymen.

CHAPTER II.

POSITION AT THE COURT OF ARTAXERXES LONGIMANUS.

Splendour of the Persian Court under the later Achæmenians—Habits of the monarch—Etiquette of the Court—Appointment of officers—Office of cupbearer, and opportunities which it gave—Friendly feeling of Artaxerxes towards Nehemiah—Nehemiah's grief and Artaxerxes' perception of it—Presence of the Queen at the time—Request made of Artaxerxes by Nehemiah—The boldness of it—The request granted, together with other minor requests—Nehemiah proceeds to Jerusalem under the protection of an armed escort.

THE Persian Court under the later Achæmenian monarchs was organized on a scale of extraordinary splendour and magnificence. Cyrus and Cambyses had been comparatively simple in their habits; even Darius, the son of Hystaspes, had not launched out into much extravagance; but from the time of Xerxes, the son of this Darius, to the close of the empire, a profusion and prodigality prevailed scarcely equalled either before or since in any other Oriental monarchy. The centre and culminating point of the magnificence was, of course, the person of the king. Glorious in his apparel, clothed in robes of richest silk, purple or crimson in hue, and adorned with embroidery in gold,[1] wearing the *kidaris*, or tall, stiff cap,[2] encircled with the diadem—a fillet or band, blue, spotted with white[3]—the Great King was the cynosure of all eyes, the centre of attraction, the principal luminary around which all the minor

[1] See Xenophon, "Cyropædia," viii. 3, § 13; Themist. "Orat." xxiv. p. 306; Justin, "Hist. Philipp." xii. 3; Q. Curt. "Vit Alex." iii. 3, p. 27.

[2] Arrian, "Exped. Alex." iv. 7; Q. Curt. "Vit. Alex." *l.s.c.*; Plutarch, "Vit. Artax." § 28.

[3] Q. Curt. *l.s.c.*

lights of the Court revolved. We are shown him in the Persepolitan sculptures seated upon his throne, with his feet resting upon a footstool, and with his sceptre in his right hand,[1] receiving those who prostrate themselves before him, or again advancing in procession, followed by the parasol-bearer and other attendants, passing through the royal apartments on his way to the throne-room or the banquet-chamber.[2] His most indispensable attendant, next to the parasol-bearer, was the bearer of the fan or fly-flapper, who often stood behind the throne,[3] and was continually employed in guarding his master from the annoyance of gnats, and flies, and mosquitoes. Other officers of the Court were the the steward of the household; the groom or master of the horse; the chief eunuch or keeper of the women; the king's "eyes" and "ears," or persons whose business it was to keep him informed on all matters of importance; his scribes, or secretaries, who wrote his letters and his edicts; his messengers, who went his errands; his "ushers," who introduced strangers to him; his "tasters," who tried the various dishes set before him, lest they should be poisoned; his cupbearers, who handed him his wine and tasted it; his chamberlains, who assisted him to bed; and his musicians, who entertained him with singing and instruments of music. Besides these the Court comprised, among its inferior officers, various classes of guards, and also door-keepers, huntsmen, grooms, cooks, and other domestic servants in great abundance, together with a vast multitude of visitors and guests—princes, nobles, captives of high rank, foreign refugees, ambassadors, travellers. We are assured that the Persian king fed daily within the precincts of his palace as many as *fifteen thousand* persons, and that the cost of each day's food was four hundred talents. A thousand beasts were slaughtered for each repast, besides abundance of feathered game and poultry. The beasts included, not only sheep, goats, and oxen, but also stags, asses, horses, and camels. Among the feathered delicacies were poultry, geese, and ostriches.[4]

The monarch himself rarely dined with his guests. For the most part he was served alone. Sometimes he admitted to his

[1] Ker Porter, "Travels," vol. i. pl. 37.

[2] Flandin, "Voyage en Perse," pl. 117.

[3] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. iii. p. 203, second edition.

[4] Ibid. pp. 213, 214.

table the queen, or the Queen-mother, or both; occasionally he condescended to invite a brother; more often he had with him two or three of his children.[1] Sometimes, at a "banquet of wine," a certain number of privileged boon-companions were received,[2] who drank in the royal presence; not, however, of the same wine, or on the same terms. The monarch reclined on a couch with golden feet, and sipped the rich and delicate wine of Helbon; the guests drank an inferior beverage, seated upon the floor.[3] At a great banquet, it was usual to divide the guests into two classes. Those of lower degree were entertained in an outer court or chamber to which the public had access, while such as were of higher rank had the privilege of entering the private apartments, and drawing near to the person of the king. Here they were feasted in a chamber opposite to the king's chamber, which had a curtain drawn across the doorway, concealing him from their gaze, but not so thick as to hide them from their entertainer.[4] Occasionally, on some very special occasion, as perhaps on the Royal birthday, or other great festival, the king presided openly at the banquet, drinking and discoursing with his lords, and allowing the light of his countenance to shine freely upon a large number of guests, whom on these occasions he treated as if they were of the same flesh and blood as himself. Couches of gold and silver, or of wood plated with those metals, were spread for all, and "royal wine in abundance"[5] was served to them in golden goblets. On these, and indeed on all occasions, the guests, if they liked, carried away any portion of the food set before them which they did not consume at the time, conveying it to their homes, where it served to support their families.[6]

The etiquette of the Persian Court was very strict. Except the "Seven Princes," no one could approach the royal person unless introduced by a court usher. Prostration—the attitude of worship—was required of all as they entered the presence. The hands of the persons introduced had to be hidden in their sleeves, so long as their audience lasted. In crossing the palace courts it was necessary to abstain carefully from touching the carpet which was laid for the king to walk on. Coming

[1] Plutarch, "Vit. Artax." § 5; Athen, "Deipnosoph." iv. p. 145.
[2] Esther v. 6. [3] Athenæus, *l.s.c.* [4] Ibid. [5] Esther i. 7.
[6] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. iii. p. 215.

into the king's presence unsummoned was a capital crime, punished by the attendants with instant death, unless the monarch himself, as a sign that he pardoned the intrusion, held out towards the culprit the golden sceptre which he bore in his hands. It was also a capital offence to sit down, even unknowingly, upon the royal throne; and it was a great misdemeanour to wear one of the king's cast-off dresses. Etiquette was almost as severe on the monarch himself as upon his subjects. He was required to live chiefly in seclusion; to eat his meals, for the most part, alone; never to go on foot beyond the palace walls; never to revoke an order once given, however much he might regret it; never to draw back from a promise once made, whatever ill effects he might anticipate from its performance. To maintain the quasi-divine character which attached to him, it was necessary that he should *seem*, at any rate, infallible, immutable, and wholly free from the weakness of repentance.[1]

It is uncertain how vacancies among the court officials were filled. Probably those of greatest dignity were disposed of by the monarch himself, as the highest posts at the courts of Constantinople and Teheran are filled up, at the present day, by the Sultan and the Shah. The minor posts were, most likely, in the gift of these highest officials. When such a person as a cup-bearer died, or was dismissed, it would be the duty of the Great Chamberlain, or Steward of the Household, to look out for a successor. There would be no lack of candidates. Eligible youths would gather in force, prompted by their own ambition, or pushed forward by their friends, and present themselves before the high dignitary, who, after due consideration, and perhaps examination, would make his choice. Ewald is probably right in suggesting, that, for such an office as that of cup-bearer, which brought the holder frequently into the presence of the king, and not only so, but into close proximity to him, a good personal appearance would be regarded as a necessary qualification, and that Nehemiah owed his appointment mainly to his "personal beauty and youthful attractions."[2] His relations may also have had influence at court, and have exerted themselves to bring him into notice; but we have no evidence of the position occupied either by his father, Hachaliah,

[1] See the author's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. iii. pp. 225, 226.

[2] "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 148, E. T.

or his brother, Hanani, so that we cannot say whether they were able in any degree to assist in his advancement.

The special duty of the cup-bearers was to fill the royal wine-cup from the vase or flagon, which stood on or near the royal board, and to hand it daintily and gracefully to their august master, supporting it with three fingers, and presenting it in such a way that the king could readily take it from their hand without any danger of spilling a single drop.[1] Before filling the cup they carefully washed it out, and before offering it to their master they ladled out a small quantity with their left hand, and swallowed it, to show that, so far as their knowledge went, it was not poisoned.[2] When not engaged in this, their main duty, they guarded the entrance to the royal apartment, and allowed persons to enter, or forbade them, at their discretion.[3] Even princes of the blood royal had to submit; and the power, thus practically exercised, of allowing or preventing audiences, made the office one of high account, and probably enabled its holder, if he were so inclined, to greatly enrich himself.

The constant access to the monarch, and the close relations thereby established, naturally led to mutual confidence, and engendered a friendly, or even affectionate, feeling between the two parties. The cup-bearer of Astyages is said to have been in such favour with him that the jealousy of Cyrus was provoked, and he sought to deprive him of his post.[4] We see by the narrative of Nehemiah with what kindliness he was regarded by Artaxerxes, and to what a degree of familiarity he was admitted (Neh. ii. 1–8). Something of this may be attributable to the peculiar temperament of the individual, who, if a weak monarch, was at any rate mild and good-natured; but the position which Nehemiah held was perhaps the main cause of the king's friendliness. In the isolation whereto court etiquette condemns an Oriental sovereign, the royal heart is apt to go out to any one brought within the rigid circle, and made by force of circumstances a companion. Artaxerxes clearly felt a personal interest in his cup-bearer, scrutinised his countenance to gather from it his frame of mind (ibid. ver. 2), was distressed when he saw in his attendant's face signs of unhappiness, and felt a keen desire to restore him to a cheerful condition. Nehemiah, on his side, when he went into the king's presence, took pains for

[1] Xen. "Cyrop." i. 3, § 8.
[2] Ibid. § 9, *sub fin.*
[3] Ibid. § 11.
[4] Ibid.

the most part to wear a cheerful aspect; and the monarch's equanimity was rarely disturbed by any sign of grief or anxiety on the countenance which he was in the habit of questioning.[1]

But a time arrived when Nehemiah was unable to restrain himself. It had come to his knowledge, through the accident of his brother Hanani having recently returned to Susa from visiting Jerusalem, that the inhabitants of the Holy City were in a state of affliction and reproach, and the city itself in a wretched condition, with its walls in ruins, and its gates burnt down (Neh. i. 2). It is impossible to say with any certainty whether these ravages were recent, or whether the condition of things was the mere result of the old demolition of the walls and gate-towers by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings xxv. 12; Jer. lii. 14), which no later ruler had replaced. Most moderns regard the expressions of Nehemiah as rather indicative of *recent* hostile attacks, and think that Jerusalem had suffered, not long before Hanani visited it, at the hands of the Samaritans, or some other hostile neighbour. However this may have been, it is clear, both from Hanani's report, and from the later inspection by Nehemiah (ibid. ii. 13–17), that decay and ruin were widely spread, and that Jerusalem was still practically, as Zechariah had called it in his day (Zech. ii. 4), an unwalled city. The fact seemed to Nehemiah, accustomed to see all the Persian towns strongly fortified, humiliating in the extreme. He bethought himself that in Jerusalem were his father's sepulchres (Neh. ii. 3), which, so long as the city lay open, might any day be desecrated by hostile feet, or dishonoured by marauding hands. He seemed to behold his people at the mercy of the stranger, without defence, without bulwark, without safeguard. A deep melancholy took possession of him as these reflections occupied his mind—a melancholy so persistent and so permanent, that it had lasted "four long months"[2] when circumstances brought it under the notice of the king.

How it happened that during this long space of time Nehemiah never entered the king's presence, it is not very difficult

[1] Neh. ii. 1: "Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence."

[2] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 123. Chisleu (Neh. i. 1) was the ninth month of the Jewish year, corresponding nearly to our December. Nisan (ibid. ii. 1) was the first month, corresponding nearly to April.

to imagine. Persian kings had several cup-bearers, who probably discharged their office each in his turn, like maids of honour at our own court. Nehemiah may have been, practically, out of office when he received the sad intelligence of Jerusalem's depressed condition from Hanani, and may not have been called upon to resume his court duties till the fourth month afterwards. Or the king may have been absent from Susa during this interval, passing the winter at one of the other royal residences, probably Babylon,[1] while Nehemiah, as is evident from his narrative, remained at Susa. In any case, there had been a long separation between the monarch and his favourite—a time during which etiquette had not called on Nehemiah to disguise his feelings, or simulate cheerfulness, and during which, consequently, his habitual tone of thought had set its seal upon his countenance. Ever since he heard of his countrymen's distress, he had been mourning, weeping, and praying (Neh. i. 4). Probably, he made an effort to appear cheerful when the time came for him to enter the presence of the king; but nature and recent habit were too strong for him, and in the expression upon his face grief predominated. Artaxerxes was swift to observe the change. His penetrating glance, quickened by affection, saw at once that it was not illness from which his attendant was suffering, but mental anxiety—pure "sorrow of heart" (ibid. ii. 2). And he immediately taxed him with his sadness, and inquired the reason of it. Then, Nehemiah says, he was "very sore afraid." Persian subjects were expected to feel perfectly happy so long as they were in their sovereign's presence, and Artaxerxes would according to Persian notions have been justified in severely punishing one who was so rude as to look sad when the royal eye was resting upon him. But Artaxerxes had no such thought or intention. His one and only desire was to assuage his favourite's grief, if possible, by removing its cause. "*Why* is thy countenance sad?" he therefore asked; "why art thou afflicted? What is it that thou wantest? For what dost thou make request?" And Nehemiah, dismissing his fears, opened his heart fully to his royal master, recounted the woes of Jerusalem, and asked for a commission to proceed to Palestine, to rebuild the ruined walls of his ancestral city, restore

[1] Xen. "Cyrop." viii. 6, § 22.

the gates, and remove his people's affliction and reproach (ibid. ii. 5–8).

It is noted by Nehemiah, that the queen was seated by her husband's side, when he preferred his bold petition (ibid. ver. 6). The sole legitimate queen of Artaxerxes Longimanus, who, like other Persian monarchs, had many concubines, was Damaspia, the mother of his son and successor, Xerxes the Second.[1] May we gather from the record, that she sympathized with the cup-bearer,[2] and, if she did not actually intercede with her husband on his behalf, at any rate gave a tacit approval to his request? Persian queens so often exerted an influence for evil over their consorts, that it would be a satisfaction to feel that on one occasion the influence of one was used on the right side, and helped forward a cause which deserved to prosper.

We have called the request of Nehemiah "a bold petition." In the West, for a mere cup-bearer, a palace menial, to ask of his royal master the government of a province, would be not merely bold, but strange and unprecedented. Oriental notions are, however, different. In the East the royal favour covers every deficiency—eunuchs, mere palace chamberlains, are often advanced to posts of the highest honour, and even barbers are said to be sometimes invested with governorships. Still, it is not often that appointments are made to posts of such high responsibility from the class to which Nehemiah belonged—the rank and file of the palace officials—and it was certainly a bold act on his part to propose himself for the office. But he undoubtedly possessed a large amount of self-esteem, and he had probably a great reliance on the king's attachment and affection towards him. Further, he would have confidence in the rectitude of his motives, and the inward assurance that he was not actuated by any selfish desire of profit or advancement;[3] and he may have believed that God would not fail to answer the prayers which he had addressed to Him (Neh. i. 11), and dispose the king's heart favourably towards his petition.

It is certain that the petition was granted; and we may gather from the narrative that it was granted with the greatest readiness and promptitude. Recent historians[4] have conjec-

[1] Ctes. "Excepta. Pers." § 44.

[2] So Mr. Hunter, "After the Exile," p. 294.

[3] See Nehem. v. 14-19.

[4] Milman, "History of the Jews," vol. i. p. 435; Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 124.

tured, that, under the circumstances of the time, which was one of danger and difficulty, Artaxerxes may have been glad to have Jerusalem strengthened, and held for him by a subject on whose fidelity he could absolutely rely. No such motive, however, appears in the "Memoir" of the cup-bearer. To Nehemiah the happy result seemed to flow wholly from the king's favour towards himself, in which he traced no motive of worldly policy, but only "the good hand of his God" (Neh. ii. 8; comp. ver. 18). God, he thought, had touched the king's heart, and made him so gracious and generous. It was for him to take advantage of the monarch's gracious mood; and, accordingly, he followed up his first request with others of less importance, but still not wholly insignificant. "Let letters be given me," he said, "to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; and a letter unto Asaph, the keeper of the king's park, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace (fortress?) which appertaineth to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into" (ibid. ii. 7, 8). "The governors beyond the river"—the satrap of Syria and other subordinate officials—would have been likely to interfere, and give trouble, unless they had had firmans addressed to them—communications from the court requiring them to further, and not hinder, the new authority which it had pleased the king to set up. Ezra had been similarly accredited (Ezra vii. 21), and had taken care to present the firmans as he passed through the provinces (ibid. viii. 36). Nehemiah would feel that he had still greater need of such authorizations than his predecessor, since his mission was certainly of greater importance, and more likely to provoke opposition, and even hostility. This was sufficient reason for his second demand, which the king granted as a matter of course (Neh. ii. 8), though again Nehemiah saw "the good hand of his God" in the royal complaisance. His third request for a gift of timber was also reasonable enough. Zerubbabel had been supplied with timber for the Temple by the Phœnicians (Ezra iii. 7). Since his time the Persian monarchs had acquired domains in the regions of the far West, having "paradises" both in Phœnicia,[1] and (probably) in Palestine. A "paradise" was a walled enclosure, containing trees and woods, either planted or of natural growth, suited

[1] Diod. Sic. xvi. 41, § 5.

for the breeding and hunting of wild animals. Nehemiah asked for a letter to Asaph, the keeper of a royal paradise, probably near Jerusalem,[1] which should authorize him to make from time to time demands for timber, to be cut for him therein, for three purposes—1. For the repair of the old fortified palace of the governors, which adjoined the Temple; 2. For the repair of the city wall, and especially of the gates in it (ibid. vii. 1); and 3. For the dwelling-house which he must arrange for himself until such time as the palace of the governors should be fit for his inhabitation. This third modest request was also granted without demur or delay.

Having obtained the necessary firmans, as quickly as official dilatoriness permitted, Nehemiah was, it may be presumed, ready—nay, anxious—to set off. But there still remained one important point to be settled. Was he, like Ezra, to be allowed to make the journey by himself, or only accompanied by his own friends and servants, or was he to have a royal escort? Ezra, if he had not declined such a protection, had at any rate given Artaxerxes to understand that he did not need it (Ezra viii. 22), and had made the journey unaccompanied by any Persian force. Should Nehemiah be permitted to do the same? The king seems to have taken the matter into his own hands, and to have determined otherwise. He "sent with Nehemiah captains of the army and horsemen" (Neh. ii. 9). A Pechah, or king's officer, appointed to the governorship of a distant province, must be surrounded by a certain amount of state, to impress the people of the countries through which he passed, and their rulers, with respect for his authority, and the dignity of the Crown which he represented. Ezra's large band was, alone, perhaps sufficiently imposing: Nehemiah's small company would have been looked on with contempt, and probably have suffered attack at the hand of marauding tribes (Ezra viii. 31), unless it had been protected by a guard of soldiers. Artaxerxes therefore, as a last act of attention to his friend before parting with him for an indefinite period, gave orders that a body of horse should escort the new governor to his province.

[1] The name, Asaph, favours this view, and it would scarcely have been worth which to bring timber, for the purposes mentioned, from any great distance.

CHAPTER III.

REMOVAL TO JERUSALEM—REPAIR OF THE WALLS.

Nehemiah's journey—Probable halt at Damascus, and interview with the satrap of Syria—Route followed from Damascus to Jerusalem—Entry into the city—Secret survey of the walls—Arrangement made for the repairs—Feelings of Sanballat—His scoffs and jeers—Progress of the work—Attempts of Sanballat to hinder it, how met by Nehemiah—Completion of the walls in fifty-two days—Further efforts of Sanballat and their failure—Final arrangements for the security of the city.

We have no account of Nehemiah's journey from Susa to Jerusalem. It is possible, as he was lightly equipped, and accompanied only by a small body of horsemen, that he took the short route, from Susa to Babylon, from Babylon up the course of the Euphrates to Circesium, and from Circesium, by way of Tadmor or Palmyra, to Damascus. This route would save him a *détour* of some hundred and fifty, or two hundred, miles,[1] and would be quite practicable for a light expedition, such as his would seem to have been. Speed would have been an object with him, as the sooner he could give protection to his "fathers' sepulchres" (Neh. ii. 3) the better, and, if there was danger by the way (Ezra viii. 31), it would be best avoided by promptness and celerity. The desert between the Euphrates, at its junction with the Khabour, and Damascus is, no doubt, formidable; but it was a caravan route in the ancient times, and, under the Babylonians and the Persians, small detachments were wont to cross it occasionally.[2] Travelling by this line, the governor with his escort might reach Damascus in two months, and Jerusalem ten or twelve days later.

[1] See above, "Life and Times of Ezra," p. 33.

[2] Berosus, Fr. 14.

At Damascus he would naturally make a halt. It was a place of great importance under the Persians, and is not unlikely to have been at the time the residence of the satrap of Syria.[1] Its luxuriant beauty, its deep shades, its sparkling streams, and its thronged streets would charm him after the dazzling glare and awful solitude of the desert, and he can scarcely be blamed if he yielded to the temptation of resting a few days in this loveliest of earthly paradises. If we may suppose the satrap of Syria to have been residing within the limits of the city when Nehemiah reached it, there would have been an additional reason for delay, since the Jerusalem governor had letters from the Persian Court to its chief Syrian officer (Neh. ii. 7, 8), which he was bound to present, and such presentation would naturally be followed by a consultation between the two authorities. It is not altogether clear what exactly was the relation which Artaxerxes intended to establish between them; but, on the whole, there are grounds for believing that the Syrian satrap was to have a certain jurisdiction and authority over the Jerusalem governor,[2] though he was not intended to interfere under ordinary circumstances with the administration of his subordinate's province. If such was their mutual position, it is clear that delicate questions might arise between them upon occasions, and it would have been the duty of both to make such arrangements as might be possible beforehand, for avoiding friction and collision.

Artaxerxes' satrap of Syria a few years previously had been Megabyzus,[3] a Persian noble of the highest rank, of great talent, and of considerable ambition. Megabyzus headed a revolt against his sovereign, about B.C. 446 or 447, and, though forced shortly to make his submission, was still maintained in his government. It is almost certain that one of the letters which Nehemiah took with him on quitting Susa, and proceeding to Jerusalem, in B.C. 444, was addressed to him. May we not regard it as probable that these two influential subjects of the Great King met, and exchanged ideas on the state of the Empire, and the proper policy to be pursued in the South-Western provinces under the circumstances of the period? Conceivably, Nehemiah was intended to be a check upon

[1] No other Syrian town could dispute the palm with Damascus, unless it were Hamath.

[2] Compare Nehem. iii. 7.

[3] Ctesias, "Excerpt. Pers." §§. 37–39.

Megabyzus, whose fidelity could not but have been distrusted. In that case, the meeting would have involved some degree of embarrassment on both sides, and it may have required some tact and discretion on the part of the subordinate to avoid a quarrel with his superior.

From Damascus to Jerusalem Nehemiah would almost certainly follow the route across the Hauran to Aphek, and then by the Jordan valley to Jericho. He would avoid the Samaritan highland, which was in the hands of "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (Ezra iv. 1), and would make his way, down the well-known "Ghor," to the nearest point of the Judæan territory, which was probably at this time not far north of the "City of Palm-trees."[1] The Samaritans seemingly heard of his advance (Neh. ii. 10), and were "grieved exceedingly"; but no attempt was made to obstruct his journey, or even to delay his arrival at his destination. The knot of desperate men collected in the old Israelite capital, and animated with a bitter hatred of the neighbouring Jewish community, which had rejected their offers of friendship (Ezra iv. 3) and declined to allow them to help in the rebuilding of the Temple, saw with sullen disappointment the coming of a man who was likely to advance the welfare of their detested neighbours, but did not venture on making any open display of hostility. Probably they feared to come into collision with the Persian escort, an attack on which would have been a flagrant act of rebellion, and have drawn down upon them the vengeance of the Great King.

Nehemiah therefore entered Jerusalem without encountering any opposition. Though no mention is made of it in his "Memoir," we cannot but suppose that he was met by the authorities of the city with, at any rate, a show of rejoicing, and given the welcome due to one whom the Great King delighted to honour. Ezra, if still resident in the city, would certainly have seen his arrival with keen satisfaction, and Eliashib, the high priest, the "rulers," and the "nobles" (Neh. ii. 16), cannot for shame have held back, whatever may have been their secret feelings. It was not as yet known what exactly Nehemiah's commission was (ibid.); but none could fail to understand that the king in sending down a native governor had been actuated by a friendly intention, and wished him to "seek the welfare"

[1] See Deut. xxxiv. 3; 2 Chron. xxviii. 15. Compare Joseph. "A. J." iv. 6, § 1; "B. J." i 6, § 6.

of the inhabitants (ibid. ver. 12). Exaggerated notions are rather likely to have been entertained of the benefits about to be conferred, though the particular benefit of the restoration of the walls was scarcely one that would have been suspected.

To Nehemiah himself, however, the thought of his commission was continually present—"the one idea in his mind was the restoration of the broken circuit of the once impregnable walls of the Holy City."[1] If he did not at once divulge this, the main purpose with which he had come, it was from a fear that the purpose, if divulged, should be frustrated. Nehemiah well knew how jealously Jerusalem was regarded by her neighbours, and how anxious many of them would be to keep her in the state of weakness and depression, from which it was his object to raise her up. He therefore proceeded with the utmost secrecy and caution. The first thing necessary was, he felt, to form a distinct conception in his own mind of the extent of the ruin which required to be repaired. For this purpose he must make a personal exploration. But to do so openly would have been almost the same thing as to proclaim his intention. He planned, therefore, a secret expedition. Three days after his arrival, waiting till nightfall, he mounted an ass or mule, and "accompanied by a few followers on foot, descended into the vale of Hinnom, and threaded his way in and out among the gigantic masses of ruin and rubbish through that memorable circuit, familiar now to every traveller like the track of his native village. Each point that Nehemiah reaches is recorded by him as with that thrill inspired by the sight of objects long expected, and afterwards long remembered—the Spring of the Dragon (was it that already the legend had sprung up which describes the intermittent flow of the Siloam water as produced by the opening and closing of the dragon's mouth?); the gate outside of which lay the piles of the sweepings and off-scourings of the streets; the masses of fallen masonry, extending as it would seem all along the western and northern side; the blackened gaps where the gates had been destroyed by fire; till at last by the royal reservoir the accumulations became so impassable that the animal on which he rode refused to proceed; then he turned, in the dead of night, along the deep shade of the Kedron water-course, looking up at the eastern wall, less ruinous than the rest, and so back once more by the gate that opened on the ravine of

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 124.

Hinnom."[1] In silence and deep darkness the Pechah returned to his dwelling-house within the city, having "possessed himself with the full idea of the desolation,"[2] and so rendered himself competent to form a comprehensive scheme for putting the entire wall rapidly into a state of repair.

It was necessary, first of all, to take the other authorities of the place into council. So, on the next day probably, Nehemiah summoned to his presence "the priests, the nobles, and the rulers" (Neh. ii. 16)—Eliashib doubtless, the head of the priestly order, the elders of Jerusalem, and the head-men of such villages as lay near at hand—and opened to them the extent of his powers and the nature of his designs (ibid. ver. 18). Artaxerxes, he said, had empowered him to rebuild the entire circuit of the walls, and to place the city in a state of complete defence. The thing must be done as quickly as possible. Preparations must be quietly made, and on a given day workmen must present themselves along the whole line of the defences, ready all of them to set to the work simultaneously, and build the portion allotted to them. New materials would not be needed, unless it were for the gates and the gate-towers; the walls might be rebuilt out of the ruins and rubbish which marked their former site. The best arrangement would be that the inhabitants of each quarter should repair the part of the wall nearest to where they dwelt. All classes should take part in the work, priests, nobles, tradesmen, merchants, and artisans. As the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not sufficiently numerous to accomplish the entire task in the short time that was needful, other workers must be called in from the country towns and villages, who might gather themselves together at the part of the wall which was nearest to them. Jericho, Tekoah, Gibeon, Mizpeh, Zanoah, Beth-haccarem, Beth-zur, Keilah, could easily send a portion of their population to share the labours of those who dwelt in Jerusalem, since none of these places lay at any great distance from the capital. A general willingness to give their services seems to have been displayed, alike by the men of Jerusalem and the dwellers in the country districts, since only one abstention is noticed—that of the "nobles of Tekoah." These proud aristocrats declined to bear their share of the burden, and unpatriotically absented themselves, while their fellow-townsmen of lower rank were more active than most

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 125. [2] Ibid.

others in giving their aid.[1] The wall was parcelled out among forty-four working parties,[2] who, on a given day, all mustered in their several places, and began the tasks allotted to them. On the eastern side of the city, in the neighbourhood of the Temple, laboured the priests (Neh. iii. 1, 28), the Nethinim (ibid. ver. 26), the goldsmiths and the merchants (ver. 32); about the north-east corner the work was done by the men of Jericho (ver. 2); along the north wall were employed the Tekoites, the men of Gibeon, and the men of Mizpeh (vers. 5–7); towards the west, the inhabitants of Zanoah; towards the south, a portion of the men of Mizpeh, together with the inhabitants of Beth-haccarem, Beth-zur, and Keilah. The Levites worked at portions of the wall of Ophel (ver. 17). Small parcels of the wall seem to have been assigned to individuals, either singly, or in pairs, who exercised a superintendence over the men of their trade or of their neighbourhood. Particular attention appears to have been paid to the gate-towers, eleven in number, which broke the line of the walls at irregular intervals. These had to be provided with guard-rooms, heavy wooden doors, solid bars, and other fastenings, as the security of the town would greatly depend upon them. So far as can be gathered from Nehemiah's account, there were at this time five gates in the eastern wall, the "sheep gate" (vers. 1, 32); the "prison gate" (ch. xii. 39); the "gate Miphkad" (ch. iii. 31); the "horse gate" (ver. 28); and the "water gate" (ver. 26); three in the northern wall, the "fish gate" (ver. 3), the "old gate" (ver. 6), and the "gate of Ephraim" (ch. xii. 39); two in the southern wall, the "dung gate" (ch. iii. 13) and the "fountain gate" (ver. 15); and one in the western wall, the "valley gate" (ver. 13). There were also, in the spaces between the gates, and especially at any angle formed by the walls, or at any weak point, protecting towers, or bastions, of considerable strength, which projected beyond the general line of the walls, and would enable the defenders to open a flanking fire upon any enemy who should advance to attack the curtain. Such were the towers of Meah and Hananeel towards the north-eastern corner of the city (ver. 1), the "tower of the furnaces," probably at the north-western angle (ver. 11), "the tower which lieth out from the king's high house" (ver. 25), a tower in the northern part of the eastern wall, and "the great tower that lieth out," probably at the junc-

[1] Nehem. iii. 5.

[2] Ibid. vers. 1–32.

tion of the wall of Ophel with the south-eastern angle of the Temple area.[1]

The work began, and it was not long before intelligence of what was taking place at Jerusalem was conveyed to the knot of malcontents at Samaria, and greatly fluttered and excited them. The condition of the Samaritan capital appears to have been the following. The city was held by a Persian garrison, called by Nehemiah "the army of Samaria" (Neh. iv. 2). Its governor, who must have derived his authority from the satrap of Syria, was a certain Sanballat, a "Horonite," perhaps a native of one of the Israelite Beth-horons (Josh. xvi. 3, 5), perhaps a Moabite from the distant city of Horonaim in the region east of the Dead Sea. His position was one of dignity and influence. He was on terms of close alliance with an Ammonite chief, named Tobiah, not necessarily the representative of the Persian government in the district of Ammon, much less the sub-satrap of Transjordanic Palestine,[2] but still a personage of importance, who had a certain number of Ammonites at his beck and call (Neh. iv. 7). He had a connection also with an Arab sheikh, Geshem or Gasham (ibid. ii. 19; vi. 6), who commanded the services of a band of those persistent marauders, and seems to have been willing at any time to place their swords at the disposal of the Samaritan governor. Further, strange to say, he was allied by marriage with the family of the Judæan High Priest, Eliashib, his daughter, Nicaso, being wedded to Manassah,[3] son of Joiada, and one of Eliashib's grandsons. Sanballat was thus in a position which of itself rendered him formidable, and, being a man of a reckless and violent temper, might be expected to cause serious trouble. He had from the first disliked Nehemiah's appointment, and augured ill from it (Neh. ii. 10). A powerful Jerusalem meant a depressed Samaria; a royal representative in Southern would throw into the shade a satrapial representative in Central Palestine. Sanballat could not but feel that Nehemiah was a rival, and dread his probable zeal and activity. But he had not anticipated the extraordinary steps, as they seemed to him, that Nehemiah was now taking. What? Rebuild the walls of the city? Make it

[1] Traces of this tower seem to have been found by the Palestine Exploration Fund (see "Our Work in Palestine," Plan opp. p. 34).

[2] So Dean Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 132.

[3] Joseph. "Ant. Jud." xi. 7, § 2.

once more a stronghold, a fortress? Would not this be a flagrant act of rebellion against the king (ibid. ii. 19)? Was there not in the archives a decree of a Persian king[1]—and the law of the Medes and Persians altered not—that the walls of this city —"the rebellious and the bad city" (Ezra iv. 12)—"be not builded" (ibid. ver. 21)? Who was Nehemiah, that he should set this decree at nought? And were not the Jews altogether too feeble to effect anything? Sanballat and his friend Tobiah, equally scoffed at the notion of so great a work being taken in hand by so weak a people. "What do these feeble Jews?" said the former. "Will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive out of the heaps of rubbish the stones which have been burned" (Neh. iv. 2)? "Let them build," said the latter—"that which they build, if a fox go up it, he shall even break down their stone wall" (ibid. ver. 3). The scoffs may not have been genuine; the contempt which they expressed may not have been felt; but they were well suited to exasperate and annoy, which was probably the object wherewith they were uttered. Nehemiah felt them keenly in his secret soul (ibid. vers. 4, 5), but he did not allow them to influence his acts. He simply kept his labourers incessantly at work. While some extracted from the rubbish-heaps all the material that was sound and fit for use, others removed to a distance the broken fragments and useless portions, carrying them away on their backs (ver. 10); others again conveyed the sound material to the builders, who laid the stones in order, tier upon tier, and no doubt cemented them together with mortar, working indefatigably from early morning to night (ver. 21). In this way, in an incredibly short space of time, the wall was raised to half its designed height (ver. 6); all the gaps in it were filled up (ver. 7); and it became evident that mere talk was of no avail, and that, if the work was to be frustrated, something must be *done*, some active steps must be taken to interfere with, and drive away, the builders. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, accordingly consulted together, and determined to resort to violence. Collecting together a strong body of Arabians, Ammonites, and Philistines of Ashdod (ver. 7), they advanced upon Jerusalem,

[1] According to some, the decree was issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus himself ("Dict. of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 487); but this is very improbable. The "Artaxerxes" of Ezra iv. 7–23 can only be the Pseudo-Smerdis.

and threatened a hostile attack. This might possibly have been successful, had it been sudden and unanticipated; but the conspirators allowed their project to get wind, and Nehemiah was able to take effectual steps to meet the danger which threatened him. He had a large body of slaves whom he had brought from Susa,[1] on whose fidelity and courage he placed the firmest reliance. Half of these he employed as labourers; the other half he armed with spears, bows, shields, and habergeons (ver. 16), and held in reserve, ready to rush to the front if the enemy should make their appearance. He also armed to some extent the labourers themselves; the bearers of burdens, who needed to use one hand only in their work, went about their task carrying a sword, or other weapon, in the other (ver. 17); the actual builders, who needed to employ both their hands in building, had swords fastened to their girdles (ver. 18). Further, in the places most open to attack, bodies of the citizens, armed with swords, spears, and bows, were set, to keep watch constantly, and were exempted from the duty of labouring (ver. 13). So excellent were these dispositions and arrangements, that Sanballat's followers never ventured on an attack. They hovered about the neighbourhood, kept the builders in continual alarm, menaced one point after another, but never crossed swords with their adversaries. Once only did an assault seem imminent. Then Nehemiah "looked, and rose up, and said to the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not afraid of them: remember Jehovah, the great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (ver. 14). But the alarm passed off: the intending assailants found that their design was known, their adversary on his guard (ver. 15), and drew back without coming to blows.

But the fatigue and tension, to which the builders were subjected, was great. They all laboured incessantly from the first dawn of day until the evening (ver. 21). Even during the night a portion had to keep watch. Of Nehemiah himself, his slaves, and his body-guard—perhaps "the escort which had followed him from Persia,"[2] it is recorded, that not one of them, while the danger lasted, took off a single article of their clothing (ver. 23). It must have been a vast relief to all those concerned, when, at the close of the fifty-second day (Neh. vi. 15)—after more than seven weeks of perpetual toil and strain—the wall

[1] So Dean Stanley ("Lectures," vol. iii. p. 127). [2] Ibid. p. 128.

was pronounced to be finished, the building completed, and nothing to remain but the setting up of the gates in the gate-towers (ibid. ver. 1).

To Sanballat, however, and his adherents, the news was a bitter grief. They had been baffled, out-generalled, beaten. Still, however, they did not wholly despair. Something, it seemed to them, might still be done, if not to defeat their antagonist, at any rate to discredit him with his master, and perhaps bring about his recall. While the work of building was still going on, Sanballat and his friends had had frequent communications[1] with Nehemiah by means of messengers, and had endeavoured to persuade him to quit Jerusalem, and come to a conference with them on the Samaritan border, with the hope of either intimidating him by their representations, or perhaps of kidnapping his person. To all such messages Nehemiah had made one uniform answer—"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"[2] Now they sent to him a fresh proposal for a conference, embodied in a formal document, which they left open, that its contents might become known to all (Neh. vi. 5). In this they told him that there were rumours afloat to his discredit, with respect to which some steps should be taken. It was said that he designed to throw off his allegiance to the Persian king, and openly head a rebellion of the Jewish people; that in preparation for this he had given command to certain members of the prophetical order at Jerusalem on a given day to proclaim him king of Judah (ibid. ver. 7); and that his fortification of the city was not, as he had pretended, to secure it against the attacks of marauding neighbours, but to enable it to resist the forces of Persia, if they should be marched into Palestine to put his rebellion down. These reports, they said, were sure to come to the ears of Artaxerxes, and to cause trouble—would it not be advisable that he should meet the authorities of Samaria, and confer with them on the existing state of affairs, and the steps which it would be best to take under the circumstances? It would be giving Sanballat and his friends too much credit for simplicity, and too little for sagacity, to suppose that they expected to impose upon Nehemiah by the apparently friendly tone of this

[1] "Yet they sent unto me *four times* after this sort" (Neh. vi. 4).

[2] Ibid. ver. 3.

communication, or at all thought it likely that he would trust himself in their hands. They were, no doubt, prepared for his indignant reply to Sanballat—"There are no such things done as thou sayest; but thou feignest them out of thine own heart" (ibid. ver. 8). But they calculated that the charge which they had made in an *open* letter, would be bruited abroad, would alarm many of Nehemiah's own adherents, would "weaken his hands" (ver. 9), perhaps shake his resolution, and, above all, would raise suspicions with respect to his fidelity in the breast of the Great King. The recall of Nehemiah while his work was still incomplete, while the gate-towers were still unfinished, the gates not being as yet set up in them (ibid. ver. 1), would have been a triumph to the party of Sanballat, and a heavy blow and sore discouragement to that of the more patriotic section of the Jews.

Aware, however, that this scheme, clever as it undoubtedly was, might miscarry, Sanballat and his friends were not content until they had devised another. If they failed to get it generally believed that Nehemiah was a traitor and a plotter of revolt, they might perhaps sufficiently discredit him by causing him to act in such a way as should make it plausible to tax him with cowardice. For this purpose they resolved to work upon his fears by the instrumentality of his own professed and seeming friends. There was a certain Shemaiah, a man of some position,[1] who claimed to be a Jehovistic prophet, and was allied with other members of the prophetical order, and particularly with a prophetess of repute named Noadiah (Neh. vi. 14). Sanballat and Tobiah bribed this person (ibid. ver. 12), and induced him to become their tool and instrument. They bade him assure Nehemiah, that a plot existed to assassinate him, and deliver him a solemn message, as from God, that there was one way only by which he could save his life—he must withdraw himself from the work in which he was engaged, and secretly take refuge in the Temple building, where alone he could be safe. Shemaiah was probably a priest,[2] and therefore had access to the sacred edifice—he proposed to meet Nehemiah there (ibid. ver. 10), and suggested that they should close the doors against intruders, and remain in hiding till the danger

[1] His pedigree, at any rate, was known. He was "the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabeel" (Neh. vi. 10).

[2] A priest of the name is mentioned in ch. xii. 36, and again in xii. 42.

was past. Noadiah, and the other *soi-disant* prophets, made similar representations (ver. 14). But again Nehemiah's constancy and courage withstood the strain to which they were put. He could not this time say confidently as before, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou preparest them out of thine own heart" (ver. 8); for it was quite possible, he must have felt, that a plot did exist for his assassination; but, plot or no plot, he would not take the course recommended; he felt that it would be unworthy of him. "Should such a man," he said, "as I flee?" (ver. 11). Can I, the Governor, the head of the state, to whom all look for direction, take to flight, leave my post, hide myself? Assuredly not—not even to save my life. And would my life be saved, if I followed the advice tendered me? Would it not rather be forfeited? "Who is there, that, being as I" (*i.e.* a layman[2]), "would go into the temple to save his life?" or, "could go into the temple and live?" Any "stranger," not of the seed of Aaron, who entered the sanctuary, was by the law (Num. xviii. 7) to be put to death. Thus, once more, Nehemiah, trusting little to advisers, but much to his own sense of right, by following the plain path of duty, avoided the trap set for him.

Even after the frustration of this second attempt, the party of Sanballat did not cease its machinations. Tobiah the Ammonite was connected by marriage with several Jews of high position in Jerusalem, and an active correspondence was carried on between him and them (Neh. vi. 17, 18). Continual reports were sent him of the proceedings of Nehemiah (ibid. ver. 19), and endeavours were made to present his conduct to Nehemiah in a favourable light. When these efforts were attended with but little success, the mask of amity was once more thrown off, and intimidation again resorted to. "Tobiah sent letters to put Nehemiah in fear" (ibid.).

The work, however, progressed, and drew to its conclusion, notwithstanding all these manœuvres. There had been a delay in the construction of the strong doors, wherewith the gate-towers had to be furnished (Neh. vi. 1), perhaps to obtain for them well-seasoned wood, or wood of a superior quality, perhaps to strengthen them with an external plating of bronze or other metal. When the gates of a town were attacked, it was a

[2] See Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 157.

common practice to apply fire to the doors;[1] and, to obviate this, it was usual to coat the doors externally with metal. When we hear of "gates of brass" (Psa. cvii. 16; Isa. xlv. 2), we must understand wooden doors plated in this way,[2] and not solid masses of metal, which would have been too heavy and unwieldy. If the gates of Jerusalem were thus coated, we can understand a delay in their completion for some considerable time beyond the fifty-two days which had sufficed for the erection of the walls and the gate-towers. But at length they were ready, and Nehemiah "set them up" in the gate-ways (Neh. vii. 1), either hanging them upon hinges, or otherwise arranging them so that they could be readily opened and closed.[3] At the same time he arranged the fastenings (ibid. iii. 3, 6, 13, 14, 15), which probably consisted of heavy cross-bars, held at either end by rings or "catches," securely fixed in the gate-posts. Thus the material defences were complete—the special work was accomplished for which Nehemiah had asked and obtained the king's leave to quit the court and visit Jerusalem (ibid. ii. 5, 6). After-ages accounted this Nehemiah's great glory. When the Son of Sirach set himself to "praise famous men" (Ecclus. xliv. 1), his eulogy of Nehemiah was couched in the following terms—"Among the elect was Neemias, whose renown is great, who raised up for us the walls which were fallen, and set up the gates and the bars, and raised up our ruins again" (ibid. xlix. 13). When, at a later date, "the great military historian and archæologist of the Jewish nation,"[4] Josephus, looked back upon what Nehemiah had achieved, he thus expressed himself—"Though Nehemiah lived to a good old age, and performed many other noble acts, yet the eternal monument of himself that he left behind him was the circuit of the walls of Jerusalem."[5]

But walls alone are insufficient for the protection of a city, which must always depend far more upon the arms of its citizens

[1] See the Assyrian sculptures, *passim*; and compare Rawlinson's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. i. p. 474, second edition.

[2] The British Museum has a beautiful specimen of this kind of plating, found at Ballawat. (See the "Transactions of the Society of Bibl. Archæology," vol. vii. pp. 83–88).

[3] Assyrian gates were not hung upon hinges, but worked upon pivots (ibid. opp. p. 86).

[4] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 128.

[5] Joseph. "Ant. Jud." xi. 5, § 8.

than on any mere material bulwarks. Nehemiah was quite aware of this. No sooner were the walls finished, the gate-towers completed, and the gates hung in them, than he proceeded to create an organization for the continual defence of the gates and walls by a guard or garrison. To the Levites generally, together with the Temple porters and singers, the special duty of keeping watch and ward continually was assigned (Neh. vii. 1); and further, the citizens were required to organize a civil guard, which should come on duty at nightfall, should see the town-gates shut and barred, watch the walls over against their houses, and in the morning see that the gates were not opened too early. In the East it is usual to make sunrise the time for opening; Nehemiah required that the gates of Jerusalem should be kept shut "till the sun *was hot*" (ibid. ver. 3)—*i.e.* till eight or nine o'clock. This was an extraordinary precaution, intended probably to meet attempts at surprise on the part of Sanballat and his friends, who were regarded as capable of any act, however treacherous, which might seem likely to serve their purpose.

Finally, that there might be persons whose duty it should be to see that the system of defence, thus inaugurated, should be constantly kept up, and not allowed to fall into desuetude, Nehemiah appointed two military commandants to take charge of the town. These were his brother, Hanani, who had returned from Susa (Neh. i. 1, 2) to Jerusalem, and a certain Hananiah—"a faithful man, and one who feared God above many" (ibid. vii. 2), who had hitherto been governor of the fortress (ibid.).

CHAPTER IV.

MATERIAL CONDITION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

Distress of the poorer classes at Jerusalem—Principal causes of it—Exactions of governors—Disturbed state of the country—Hostility of Samaria—Rapacity of the nobles, and operation of the law of debt—Neglect of those provisoes in the Law which aimed at preventing extreme poverty — Consequences — Steps taken by Nehemiah to alleviate the distress—His redemption of Hebrews sold to foreigners—His refusal to receive any payment for himself—His success in persuading the nobles to make restitution to the poorer classes.

THE poverty and distress of the Jewish people at the time of Nehemiah's appointment to be their governor, is one of the most remarkable, and one of the most painful, features of the period. From the account given of the return of the Jews under Zerubbabel, such extreme penury and suffering could not have been anticipated. Though, according to the narrative of Josephus, the wealthier of the exiles remained behind, unwilling to leave their lands and houses, and the other possessions which they had accumulated,[1] yet the actual emigrants who set forth had a fair share of this world's goods, and, under the favour and protection of the Persian kings, might have seemed likely to establish a wealthy and prosperous community. Cyrus himself had opened the doors of his treasury on their behalf, and bestowed on them out of it "vessels of gold and silver" to the number of "five thousand and four hundred" (Ezra i. 8–11). Their neighbours generally—"all they that were about them" (ibid. ver. 6)—had "strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts,

[1] Joseph. "Ant. Jud." xi. 1.

and with precious things" (ibid.). They had ridden forth from Babylonia, mounted, not on asses only, but on horses, and camels, and mules (ibid. ii. 66, 67). When the time came for building the Temple, they were rich enough to contribute towards its erection five thousand pounds of silver, and forty thousand drams of gold (Neh. vii. 71, 72). There had been a further influx of wealth when Ezra brought from Babylon the second body of colonists—much silver and gold which had been freely offered by the king, Artaxerxes, and his councillors (Ezra vii. 15), much which was contributed by heathen subjects of the king of a lower grade (ibid. ver. 16). The community had at first been so wealthy that many members of it built for themselves "cieled houses" (Hag. i. 4). Gifts of great value, in silver and gold, had for some time flowed in from the richer of the exiles, who, though they remained at Babylon, took a keen interest in the prosperity of their compatriots in the distant Palestine (Zech. vi. 10, 11). The community which, under Zerubbabel, rebuilt the Temple, and offered at the dedication of it "an hundred bullocks, and two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs" (Ezra vi. 17), must have been fairly prosperous and fairly rich to sacrifice on such a scale.

But, it would seem that the tide of prosperity soon began to ebb. Zerubbabel's rule was followed by that of other governors, Persian or native, who made heavy exactions from their subjects, requiring large contributions, both in money and kind, for the sustentation of their court (Neh. v. 15) and their own personal expenses. Under the Persian system of administration and government such exactions were tolerated;[1] and so long as a satrap, or other governor, remitted regularly to the Royal Exchequer the tribute of his province, and kept it tolerably quiet, little inquiry was made as to the amount that he contrived to extract from the pockets of those under his rule. A satrap was a petty king, and held a miniature court, at which the splender of the Royal Court of Susa was aped,[2] albeit at a humble distance. Justice was too often sold; and even where misrule did not proceed to such lengths, there were legitimate modes of squeezing out of the subject-class almost its last penny. A succession of rapacious governors soon reduced the most flourishing province to a state of exhaustion; and it only

[1] See the author's "Herodotus," vol. ii. p. 559, third edition.

[2] Ibid. p. 558.

required an occasional ruler of the kind to check prosperity, and introduce into a province a large amount of suffering and distress. Something of this kind seems to have happened in Judæa during the long interval, of which we know so little, between the completion of the Temple (B.C. 516) and the coming of Nehemiah to Jerusalem (B.C. 444). At any rate, Nehemiah, when he came into office, regarded the conduct of his predecessors, in this respect, with disapprobation, and has left on record his disapproval (ch. v. 15).

Another cause of the depressed condition of the Jewish community may have been the unsettled state of the country,[1] and the jealous hostility with which, from the time of Zerubbabel, the Jews were regarded by their northern neighbours, the Samaritans. The Persian administration was always so loose, that in the outlying parts of the empire robber bands continually maintained themselves; and Judæa was especially open to the incursions of the Bedouin tribes from the Desert, who made raids across the Jordan whenever it pleased them. The Samaritan hostility, though a less active, was a more constant factor in the depression. It shut in Judæa upon the north, and isolated her from the more friendly Phœnicians (Ezra iii. 7); it lost the Jews during many years the favour of the Persian kings (ibid. iv. 5–24); and it tended to create a feeling of insecurity in Judæa itself, which did not know how soon passive hatred might not pass into the stage of active antagonism. A community could not long greatly flourish, which had, within forty miles of it, a watchful enemy, anxious to weaken it, and hopeful one day to effect its destruction.

But, whatever bearing these external causes may have had on the material condition of the Jewish people, there is reason to believe that the main sources from which the depression sprang were internal, the people themselves being answerable for them. A desire noted by Isaiah as already existing in his day (Isa. v. 8)—the desire to add house to house and field to field—had gradually taken possession of the richer classes among the Jews who had returned from the Captivity, and persistent efforts were made by them to bring the mass of the people into a condition approaching to serfage. As the poor became gradually poorer through the exactions of governors or

[1] Zech. viii. 10. Compare Stanley's "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 97.

the burden of the Royal Tribute, and were forced to borrow money to satisfy these claims, the rich refused to lend except on one or two securities: either the borrower was required to mortgage to the lender his house, or land, or both (Neh. v. 3), or else he was forced to borrow on the security of his person, or of the person of a son or daughter (ibid. ver. 5). The pledging of the person was a custom widely spread in the ancient world,[1] and regarded as resting upon natural right, since each man, it was conceived, was master of himself, and entitled to do with himself as seemed best to him. The author of the Levitical Law, finding the practice established, had sanctioned it, but under limitations, which made it, comparatively speaking, harmless to the community. He allowed a man to pledge his person for a short term of years—six at the utmost (Exod. xxi. 2; Deut. xv. 12); and required the creditor, when the six years were out, or rather when the Sabbatical year came round, to release his debtor slave, together with his wife and children, if he had them also in his power, and at the same time to "furnish the man liberally" out of his own store with a supply of necessaries (Deut. xv. 14). In special cases, where a man was so attached to his master and his master's family that he refused to leave them, the term of service might be extended under the Levitical Law, not however indefinitely, but only until the next year of jubilee, when the Hebrew was to go out free under any circumstances (Lev. xxv. 40, 54). As these cases of strong attachment and voluntary service for a long term of years were only likely to be of very rare occurrence, the legislator felt that he had guarded sufficiently against any general descent of the poorer classes into the slave condition through that pledging of the person which he did not think it prudent wholly to disallow.

Further, the Levitical Law, while it allowed a man to pledge the person of a daughter (Exod. xvi. 7), contained no proviso permitting the same practice with respect to sons, which would naturally be a considerable check upon that wholesale enslavement of the lower orders which the Jewish aristocracy desired and contemplated.

It appears, however, that, under the circumstances of the time, the Levitical Law was ignored, or set at nought. Neither sabbatical years nor jubilee years were kept; and poor men,

[1] See Niebuhr's "Roman History," vol. i. pp. 575, 576.

once forced into slavery, were almost without hope or prospect of ever regaining their freedom. The condition of things was like that which had prevailed at Athens before the Solonian legislation,[1] and at Rome under the early Republic. A large portion of the poorer class of citizens had sunk into a state of serfage to the richer nobles. Whole families were engulfed (Neh. v. 5). Many had passed out of the hands of their own countrymen into those of the neighbouring heathen (ibid. ver. 8), who, having no sympathy with them, would be likely to be harsh masters. The population of the land was seriously diminished by this drain upon it, and that of Jerusalem was especially scanty (ibid. vii. 4).

Further, in the case of those who had not yet lost their freedom, there was a great and growing danger of their succumbing to the difficulties wherewith they were surrounded, and passing into the slave condition. Great numbers had been forced to borrow money from the rich on the security of their lands and houses. Either their crops had failed (Neh. v. 3), and they had had to buy corn for their families; or the officers of the government had come upon them for payment of their share of the Royal Tribute (ibid. ver. 4); or oppressive governors had extorted money from them (ibid. ver. 15) to defray the expenses of their table and court; they had been driven to incur a debt; and their richer brethren, neglectful of the precepts of the Law which required them to lend freely to those in distress (Deut. xv. 7–11), had insisted on securing themselves against loss by lending only upon mortgage (Neh. v. 3–5). They had also set at nought the injunction of the Law not to exact any interest from a Hebrew (Exod. xxii. 25; Lev. xxv. 36), and had fixed a rate of interest that was exorbitant,[2] and in seven years would more than double the debt. Twelve per cent. was exacted (Neh. v. 11) instead of the four or five per cent. of modern commerce, which is generally found sufficiently onerous to the borrower. Under the Law, mortgaged lands and houses were not hopelessly lost. The debtor, having no interest to pay, might not improbably redeem them (Lev. xxv. 24–27); and, in the worst case, they returned into his posses-

[1] See the author's "Herodotus," vol. iii. p. 389.

[2] It is gathered from Neh. v. 11 that the interest paid was a hundredth part of the sum borrowed *each month*, which would be equivalent to twelve per cent.

sion, or into that of his family, in the year of jubilee (ibid. vers. 28, 31), so that they could not be permanently alienated. But these wise provisoes became a dead letter, when sabbatical years and jubilee years ceased to be observed, as they did even before the Captivity (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21); and the debtors of Nehemiah's time, having once mortgaged their possessions, had no hope of ever recovering them, and, almost of necessity, went on from the pledging of their property to the pledging of their persons, and so, from being hopeless debtors, became hopeless slaves, either to their brethren, or in many instances (Neh. v. 8) to foreigners.

This condition of things stirred at once the pity and the indignation of Nehemiah. He compassionated the unhappy position of the poor debtors, and was "very angry" at the treatment which they were receiving at the hands of their richer brethren (ibid. ver. 6). At once he set to work, so far as his means allowed, to redeem the unfortunates who had been sold into slavery among the heathen (ibid. ver. 8); and he strove with all his might to alleviate the general poverty. Instead of following the example of the previous governors, who had lived at the expense of the people under their government, exacting from them corn and wine for their court, together with a money payment amounting to fifteen thousand shekels of silver annually[1] (ibid. ver. 15), he took from them nothing at all, neither provisions nor money, but supported himself and his retinue out of his own private means (ver. 14), which must have been considerable. Further, he called the nobles together, and in the presence of a "great assembly" rebuked them openly for their misconduct, and required them, not only to desist from such practices for the future, but, so far as possible, to undo their evil work in the past by restoring to the poor that whereof they had robbed them. "It is not good," he said to them, "that ye do. Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen, our enemies? I likewise, my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn. I pray you, let us leave off this pledge-taking. Restore,

[1] This estimate supposes the "forty shekels" of Neh. v. 15 to be the amount received by the former governors *daily* from their subjects. If forty shekels yearly from the head of each family is intended, the whole amount would be much greater, and the pressure of the tax on individuals much more severe.

I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them" (vers. 9–11). When the nobles, covered with shame and confusion, and perhaps in some cases really penitent, agreed to do as he desired, to make all the restorations that he had enumerated, and for the future to lend to the poor and needy without requiring anything (ver. 12), Nehemiah, not content with mere promises, which might not be followed by performance, sent for the priests, and in their presence exacted an oath of each man severally, that they would do according to their promises. To the oath he added a curse on his own part. Symbolically shaking out his lap, he exclaimed—"So may God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not his promise: even thus be he shaken and emptied" (ver. 13). "And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord" (ibid.)

"The people," we are told, "did according to this promise." There was no shrinking from it, or backing out of it. The poor, who had been deprived of them, re-entered on their lands, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses. Whatever interest they had paid on the money which they had borrowed was repaid them; if any interest was owed, doubtless it was remitted. We are not told expressly whether anything was done to relieve those who had pledged their persons, or the persons of their sons or daughters. But it is impossible to suppose that they did not share in the general remission of obligations. If the observance of the sabbatical year was not yet restored, it was on the point of restoration (Neh. x. 31). Probably all who had served their masters six years as slaves were now allowed to go free, in accordance with Exod. xxi. 2. The remainder were given to understand that they would not have to serve beyond the sexennial period. Whether Nehemiah's example was followed in the redemption of the Hebrews sold to the heathen (ibid. ver. 8) is more doubtful. Some of those sold would probably have changed hands too often to be traced; others would be dwelling at too great a distance; others again might prefer to remain in a comfortable service, rather than return to difficulty and struggle as freemen in their own country. Servitude, as practised in the East, has always been of a mild character, and Jewish slaves generally found favour in the

eyes of their masters. It would have cost, moreover, a very large sum to redeem from bondage any considerable number. We must conclude that the Jews sold during the period of distress to heathen masters, for the most part, remained in the more or less remote homes to which they had been carried,[1] and augmented that "Dispersion" (*διασπορά*),[2] which to some extent leavened heathenism, and helped to prepare the world for a dispensation less narrow than the Jewish.

[1] Compare Joel iii. 6; Isa. lxvi. 19; &c. [2] 1 Pet. i. 1.

CHAPTER V.

RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF JUDÆA.

Effects of the Captivity on the religion of Israel—Reaction against idolatry—Suspension of ritual—General decay and decline of religion—Revival under Zerubbabel—Rebuilding of the Temple and re-establishment of the Temple-worship—Position taken up with respect to the Samaritans—Recurrence of lukewarmness—The Priests and Levites under Zerubbabel—The prophets, Haggai and Zechariah—Question as to the extent to which the Mosaic Law was known to, and acted on by, Zerubbabel—Exaltation of the High-Priesthood—Advance of the Hagiocracy—General decline of religious fervour—Intermarriage with heathen—Danger of syncretism—Want of a definite sacred Book—Want of copies of the Law and of religious teaching—Early efforts of Ezra to improve matters, fail—State of Religion on the arrival of Nehemiah at Jerusalem.

THE captivity of the Jewish people in Babylon had a remarkable effect upon their religion. On the one hand it exorcised from the soul of the nation the spirit of idolatry by which it had been so long possessed; on the other hand it loosened the hold upon the people of all the outward ordinances, by which hitherto so much store had been set. The close contact into which the Jews were brought with the Babylonian idolatry, and the character of that idolatry and of the priesthood which supported it, seemed to have disenchanted the people from the charm of polytheism and idolatry altogether. The Babylonian worship was in all its essential features very different from that of the Grecian mythology. It was even worse than that of the Palestinian nations, the Phœnicians, Moabites, and Ammonites. We see in the apocryphal Epistle of Jeremiah, and in the addi-

tions to Daniel, the light in which it presented itself to the Judæan exiles, and the opinion which they formed of it. In the former document "we have the complete picture of the religious processions through the streets of Babylon, images plated with gold and silver, clothed in purple, with gilt crowns on their heads; followed and preceded by crowds of worshippers. We see them, too, in their temples, with sword and battle-axe in their hands (Baruch vi. 15, 20, 23), covered with the dust stirred up by the feet of pilgrims, blackened with the smoke of incense or candle, or with the rust which gathers over ancient gold; we see the bats, the swallows, and the cats that creep about the corners of the temples, we see the affected lamentations of the priests, with their rent clothes, shaven beards, and loud screams, and the feasts placed before them, the doors locked against intruders. We are invited to look at the paltry pilferings of the establishment by the sacred attendants. And then, in the yet later Book of the Great Daniel, we are shown the whole machinery of fraud which was at work in those sumptuous chapels at the summit and base of the temple of Bel, which Herodotus saw himself, not without suspicion of foul intrigue [1]—the enormous feasts on the great golden tables—the seventy priests with their families—the secret door by which they carried out their plots (Bel and the Dragon, 3–15)." [2] The unhappy exiles, brought into close contact with all these horrors, were shocked and disgusted—their souls revolted against the coarseness and rudeness of the system—against its gross materialism, its bare-faced impostures, its shameless profligacy.[3] And, naturally, a re-action set in. "From this time forward the national bias was changed." [4] Witnessing with their own eyes what polytheism and idolatry, when they had their full swing, when they were indulged in without check, led to, they fell back upon their own original pure monotheistic belief, and found the ideal of their religion in that of their first father, Abraham. Thenceforth, under whatever trials, the nation remained firm in its belief in One purely spiritual God, and, whatever individuals might do,[5] never relapsed any more into the

[1] Herod. i. 181–183.
[2] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. pp. 32, 33.
[3] See Herod. i. 199; Strabo, xvi. 1, § 20; Baruch, vi. 43.
[4] Stanley, "Lectures, &c.," vol. iii. p. 30.
[5] See Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 102.

idolatry to which it had been so prone from the time of the Exodus to the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

The other great effect of the Captivity on the religion was, the disuse into which the outward ordinances of worship fell, and the general dissociation of true piety from ritual and ceremony. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple involved the total cessation of sacrifice, which could not be acceptably offered elsewhere. It also involved the discontinuance of the three great festivals—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles—all of them sacrificial times, and all of them commanded to be celebrated in the one place where the Lord "placed His name" (Deut. xvi. 2, 11, 15). The removal to a foreign country put an end to the observance of the sabbatical year, and of the laws with respect to release, redemption, and inheritance. The rules with respect to clean and unclean meats, and legal purity and impurity generally, fell through in a land where all was unclean and impure, and where great numbers of Jews had no choice but to eat the food set before them or to starve. Those in a servile condition would find great difficulty in any observance of the sabbath, and could not possibly keep it by an entire abstinence from labour. The forms which it was practicable to maintain were few; and even these were, to some extent, discredited by the general sweeping away of ordinances hitherto observed in combination with them. These circumstances, if not adverse to the maintenance of a high standard of religious feeling among the few,[1] were incompatible with its existence among the many. As the Captivity lengthened itself out, as month succeeded to month, and year to year, without sacrifice, without public gatherings to a common religious centre, without high festival times, without stirring calls to common action, it is no wonder if, as seems to have been the case, religion decayed, the general tendency was downwards, and the bulk of the people sank into lukewarmness and indifference.

A striking indication of this lukewarmness and indifference appears in the general coldness with which the decree of Cyrus authorizing the exiles to return to the land of their fathers was received by the community. A free permission to return had

[1] See Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. pp. 38, 39; Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. pp. 21–25.

been given to all, but only a portion availed themselves of it (Ezra i. 5; vii. 7; viii. 1–14). It has been calculated that those who remained behind were "quite equal in number to those that set out under Zerubbabel."[1] Even these last required to have their spirits specially "stirred up by God" (Hag. i. 14; comp. Ezra i. 5) before they could bring themselves to make the venture. The spirit of religion must have sunk very low among large numbers, when an invitation to re-occupy their own land—the "land of promise"—and to restore their venerated Temple, and with it all the sacred usages so long suspended and in abeyance, fell flat upon the ears of at least half the nation, instead of arousing all, as we should have expected, to enthusiasm.

But under Zerubbabel, and especially among those who accompanied him—who "went up out of the captivity, and came again into Jerusalem and Judah" (Ezra ii. 1)—an improvement took place. God, by an outpouring of His supernatural grace, raised their spirits (Ezra i. 5), stirred up their hearts, and the result was a burst of religious fervour rarely exceeded. As the evangelical prophet had sung—"Go ye forth of Babylon; flee ye from the Chaldæans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The Lord hath redeemed His servant Jacob" (Isa. xlviii. 20) —so went they forth, "on camels, mules, asses, and (now for the first time in their history) on horses, to the sound of joyous music—a band of horsemen playing on flutes and tabrets, accompanied by their own two hundred minstrel slaves, and one hundred and twenty-eight singers of the Temple, responding to the prophet's voice, as they quitted the shade of the gigantic walls and found themselves in the open desert beyond."[2] All for a time was zeal and self-sacrifice. "The chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem" (*i.e.* to its ruined site), "offered freely for the house of God, to set it in its place—they gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments" (Ezra ii. 68, 69). They then engaged zealously in the religious tasks that came first to hand. Recognizing the pre-eminent importance of sacrifice in the Mosaic

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 178. Compare Stanley, "Lectures," vol. iii. p. 84.

[2] Stanley, vol. iii. p. 87.

system (ibid. iii. 2), they began with setting up the altar of burnt offering, which they "set upon its bases," or, in other words, "erected on the platform formerly occupied by the threshing-floor of Araunah, then for five centuries by the stately altar of David and his son Solomon, the central hearth of the future Temple."[1] When this was completed, they proceeded to the consecration of the new altar in the most solemn fashion possible. As it was the "seventh month" (ibid. iii. 1), which opened with the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. xxiii. 24; Num. xxix. 1), they began on the first day of the month with an initial sacrifice (Ezra iii. 6) of a bullock, a ram, and seven lambs, which they followed up by the restoration of the customary morning and evening burnt offering (ibid. ver. 3), and then by the celebration, in all its magnificent pomp, of the Feast of Tabernacles (ibid. ver. 4). It is expressly noted that, at this celebration, they "offered the daily burnt offerings *by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required*" (ibid.)—that is, on the first day of the feast they sacrificed thirteen bullocks, two rams, one kid, and fourteen lambs; on the second, twelve bullocks, two rams, one kid, and fourteen lambs; on the third, eleven bullocks, and the other offerings as before; on the fourth, ten bullocks; on the fifth, nine; on the sixth, eight; on the seventh, seven, and the other offerings as before; on the eighth, one bullock, one ram, one goat, and seven lambs; in all, seventy-one bullocks, one hundred and five lambs, fifteen rams, and eight kids or goats (Num. xxix. 12–38). This celebration was followed by the collection of ample materials for the construction of the Temple itself. Masons were engaged; stone was hewn; carpenters were set to work; and the cedars of Lebanon were once more, by royal permission, cut down in the northern mountains, and conveyed by the Phœnician navigators along their coast to Joppa, whence Zerubbabel's workmen transported them to Jerusalem (Ezra iii. 7). In the short space of seven months—from the seventh month of the first year, or that of the return (ibid. iii. 1), to the second month[2] of the second year (ibid. ver. 8), or that which followed—sufficient material was collected for the work to begin. Then, on a set day, the foundations of the Second Temple were laid, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem took part in the ceremony.

[1] Stanley, vol. iii. p. 95.

[2] Stanley says the "seventh" month (p. 96), but incorrectly.

Zerubbabel the Governor, Joshua the High Priest, and the "remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and *all they that came out of the captivity to Jerusalem*" (ibid. ver. 8), assembled together; and, with the sound of trumpets and cymbals (ibid. ver. 10) and the chanting of psalms antiphonally (ver. 11), witnessed the laying of the corner-stone, and "shouted with a great shout, and praised the Lord" (ibid.); and "the noise was heard afar off" (ver. 13). A portion, it is true, "wept" (ver. 12); but it was not from lack of sympathy with the movement; the "ancient men, who had seen the first house," and remembered its magnificence, wept because the new house affected no such splendour as the old, wept, but still praised God, and rejoiced in what was being done, being quite as full of religious fervour as the young men, though their zeal showed itself differently.

It was while the religious enthusiasm was still at its height that a deputation reached Jerusalem from the neighbouring city of Samaria, with an offer which was apparently friendly, and which may have been really made in a friendly spirit, but one, the acceptance of which would, it is probable, have gradually depraved, and ultimately destroyed, the Jewish religion. "Let us build with you," said the deputies, "for we seek God; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assyria, which brought us up hither" (Ezra iv. 2). The petitioners were that mixed race, which had grown up under the later Assyrian monarchs in central Palestine, which the Jews afterwards called "Cuthæans,"[1] but which became generally known to the inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, from their capital city, as "Samaritans." They consisted of colonists from various parts of the old empire of Assyria, intermixed—in what proportion it is impossible to say—with the descendants of the Ten Tribes who had been left in the land at the time of the Samaritan captivity.[2] A superstitious dread had, in the first instance, caused them to send to Nineveh for an Israelite priest, who might teach them "the manner of the God of the land" (2 Kings xvii. 26), and from the time of his arrival they had worshipped Jehovah after a sort (ibid. vers. 32, 41); but they mingled with this worship an idolatrous cult of

[1] Joseph. "Ant. Jud." ix. 14. § 3. A portion of the mixed race had come from Cuthah (2 Kings xvii. 24).

[2] See Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. pp. 206, 207.

their own old gods (ibid. vers. 29–33); and, though gradually their religion may have become to a certain extent purified from what was grossest in it, and assimilated, more or less, to the Judæan, yet it cannot be doubted that such a taint still remained of the old leaven, as would have made it perilous in the extreme for the Jewish authorities to have answered otherwise than they did, viz., by a flat refusal, which left no hope of modification or compromise. "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us" (Ezra iv. 3). Thus was this great peril averted. At the cost of turning these would-be friends into bitter and persistent enemies, "Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel" (ibid.), saved the nation, for the time at any rate, from the danger of having their religion corrupted and adulterated by intermixture with a form of belief and practice which was altogether of an inferior type, and to a considerable extent tainted with heathenism.

In this heroic refusal to accept the material aid of a rich and powerful people, at the risk of imperilling religious purity, the first fervour of the exiles who returned with Zerubbabel culminated. Then came a period of reaction. The Samaritans, exasperated at the rejection of their request, and still more, perhaps, at the manner of it, assumed an attitude of extreme hostility to their Jewish neighbours, thwarted them in their work, "weakened their hands, and troubled them in building" (Ezra iv. 4). Nor were they even content with such obstruction as they could personally offer. They contrived to poison the mind of the Persian king against his faithful and loyal subjects (ibid. ver. 5), and aroused so much jealousy and suspicion at the court, that the work at Jerusalem languished, and at last an actual order went forth from the chief authority that it should cease (ibid. ver. 21). "Then ceased the work of the house of God, which is at Jerusalem" (ibid. ver. 24). The people, checked in their aspirations, disappointed in their hopes, hindered in the task into which they had thrown themselves with so much zeal, once more grew lukewarm, persuaded themselves that "the time was not come—the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. i. 2), and set to building houses for themselves of an expensive and luxurious character (ibid. ver. 4). A wave of indifference and self-indulgence passed over the nation, and all efforts in the cause of religion were for a time suspended.

It might have been expected that, under these circumstances, the priests and the Levites would have come to the front, and have exhausted themselves in endeavours to rouse the people from their lethargy, and make them once more zealous for religion. But, so far as appears, they did nothing.[1] Zerubbabel had brought back with him from Babylon no fewer than 4,289 priests and 74 Levites (Ezra ii. 36–40; Neh. vii. 39–43). He had assigned to both orders important places in the religious system which he had initiated. He had given to the priests distinctive dresses (Neh. vii. 70), and restored to them the custody of the silver trumpets (Ezra iii. 10), which played an important part in many of the sacred ceremonies (Lev. xxiii. 24, xxv. 9; Num. x. 2, xxix. 1). He had brought them prominently forward at the laying of the foundation of the Temple (Ezra iii. 10, 12). For the Levites he had done even more. He had singled them out from the entire people to be entrusted with the task of superintending and advancing the construction of the sacred edifice (ibid. ver. 8). There is no evidence to show what exact position the two orders occupied among the returned exiles at this early date; but, on the whole, it seems most probable that the intention was to restore them to the status which they had held in the old Judæan community from the time of David, at any rate (1 Chron. xv. 4–14), to the close of the kingdom of Judah (2 Chron. xxxv. 2, 3). This intention was manifestly carried out as soon as the Temple was completed, and the condition of things which was meant to be permanent established (Ezra vi. 16, 18, 20).

It is doubtful, however, if *all* the Levitical ordinances were at once restored, and perhaps most probable that a considerable number of them still continued in abeyance. The Levites who returned were so few that they cannot have discharged all their old offices. They were, seemingly, concentrated at or near Jerusalem, not scattered widely over the territory as originally (Josh. xxi. 3–42). Whether tithes were at first assigned to them, is doubtful; perhaps they depended for their subsistence on the Temple offerings, perhaps they cultivated the lands in the vicinity of their villages (Neh. xiii. 10). The priests must have performed many of the duties previously discharged by simple Levites, and were perhaps confounded with

[1] The single reference in Haggai to the priests (Hag. ii. 11–13) represents them as passive, rather than active, at this period.

them to some extent (ibid. xi. 20). The superior dignity of the priest is, however, still generally recognized (Ezra ii. 36–40, 70; iii. 8, 10, 12), and the high priest has even a higher position than he occupied under the kings (ibid. iii. 2, 8; iv. 3; Hag. i. 1, 12, 14, ii. 2, 4; Zech. iii. 1–9).

In the absence of any religious activity among the priests and Levites, it pleased God to supply what was lacking on their part by raising up from among the returned exiles two prophets, full of zeal and energy, who took up, "though in shreds and tatters, the mantle of prophecy which had fallen upon them"[1] from the shoulders of Ezekiel and Daniel. Haggai, who became known as "Jehovah's messenger" (Hag. i. 13), was the first to come forward. In the second year of Darius, the son of Hystaspes, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, he appeared before the chiefs of the nation, Zerubbabel and Joshua, and a certain number of the nobles, in the Temple court, and, addressing the former, exclaimed, "Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts—This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." Then, turning to the nobles, he proceeded—"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways" (Hag. i. 1–5). Then, more plainly, he added—"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in the house, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord" (ibid. ver. 8). Haggai was an old man, one of those "ancients" who had seen the splendours of the former temple (ibid. ii. 3, 9; comp. Ezra iii. 12), and, being accepted as a divinely commissioned prophet, his words had great weight—Zerubbabel and Joshua bestirred themselves, and before the end of the month "all the remnant of the people" (Hag. i. 12) was induced to resume the work now for fifteen years laid aside, and push it forward with a zeal and activity which showed that God had "stirred up their spirit" (ibid. ver. 14). In vain did the satrap of Syria, Tatnai, and his secretary, Sitrabarzanes,[2] interpose their authority, and seek to stop the proceedings (Ezra v. 3–5); Zerubbabel would not allow himself to be hindered. Encouraged by Haggai (Hag. ii.

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 99.

[2] The form used by Ezra is "Shethar-boznai," but the Persian original was probably Chitra-barshana, for which the classical equivalent would be Sitra-barzanes.

1–9), he persisted in the construction of the "house," raising up its walls each day to a greater height (Ezra v. 5), and making the people labour at it continually (Hag. ii. 4). Such as felt inclined to remit their efforts, on account of the inferiority of the second "house" to the first (ibid. ver. 3), were encouraged by assurances, introduced with the emphatic phrase, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts" (ver. 6), that "the glory of the latter house should be greater than of the former" (ver. 9)—that He Himself would "fill the latter house with glory," and that "the Desire of all nations should 'come' to it" (ver. 7). After Haggai had sustained the spirit of the people during two entire months, his efforts were reinforced by those of Zechariah, the son of Iddo,[1] a younger and more vigorous prophet, who seemed to have inherited the spirit of Ezekiel, and who came forward "in the eighth month" of the second year (Zech. i. 1), and continued till the "ninth month of the fourth year" (ibid. vii. 1)—Dec. B.C. 519—alternately by earnest warnings and glorious promises stimulating the zeal of the people, and arousing the lazy and indifferent to action. The historian of the period, twice over, ascribes very pointedly the successful issue of the work to the help which these two "prophets of God" afforded to the civil and ecclesiastical rulers, Zerubbabel and Joshua, through whose prophesying it was that they "prospered," and built the house of God, and finished it (Ezra v. 2; vi. 14).

The Second Temple, begun in the second year of Cyrus the Great at Babylon (B.C. 536), was completed in the sixth year of Darius, the son of Hystaspes (B.C. 519). It was built with the full consent of the Persian king (Ezra vi. 1–12), and with the good will of the local authorities (ibid. ver. 13). Its completion was followed by its dedication. As Solomon had formally dedicated his magnificent edifice to the service of Almighty God, and offered at the dedication a great sacrifice (1 Kings viii. 63), so now Zerubbabel thought it right to dedicate his comparatively homely building, and though unable, in the "day of small things" (Zech. iv. 10), to imitate at all closely Solomon's profusion, yet deemed an offering and a sacrificial feast suitable for the occasion, and offered according to his ability. A hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve he-goats, were sacrificed upon the altar of burnt-offering (Ezra vi.

[1] So generally designated, but actually the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (Zech. i. 1).

17), the twelve he-goats being "a sin-offering for all Israel, according to the number of the tribes of Israel" (ibid.)—since the returned exiles were regarded as representing not the tribes of Judah and Benjamin only, but the entire original nation[1] (comp. Ezra ii. 70, viii. 35; Neh. vii. 73).

On the restoration of the material building followed the re-establishment of the service, which David had designed and Solomon instituted, for the continual worship of God by the nation. The priests and the Levites, few as these latter were, were divided once more into courses (Ezra vi. 18), which attended in the Temple, and performed the service of the sanctuary, each in its turn, successively. The daily sacrifice, morning and evening; daily, or at any rate, weekly, prayer (ibid. ver. 10); the special service at the beginning of each month (ibid. iii. 5); and the prolonged services three times a year, at the great festivals (ibid. vers. 4–6; vi. 19–22), were fully established as parts of the national religion, and continued doubtless to be observed under Zerubbabel, so long as he held his governorship. But the question arises, and has been brought into great prominence recently,[2] did Zerubbabel go much further than this? Was he in possession of the entire Pentateuch? Did he promulgate, as binding upon the nation under his charge, all those multitudinous precepts, which are generally regarded among ourselves as constituting "the Mosaic Law" and which occupy eleven chapters of Exodus, and almost the whole of Leviticus and Numbers? It is maintained that he did not. It is maintained, indeed, that the greater part of these precepts, of these books, was not yet in existence. The Babylonian priests, we are told,[3] and especially Ezra, composed them in Babylon, between the time of Zerubbabel's departure and Ezra's arrival in Palestine. But then, we ask, what is meant by the statement that Zerubbabel "builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, *as it is written in the law of Moses*, the man of God" (Ezra iii. 2)—what, again, by the declaration, that "they kept the feast of tabernacles, *as it is written*, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required" (ibid. ver. 4)?

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 107.

[2] See the work of Kuenen on the "Religion of Israel," translated into English by Alfred Heath May, and published by Williams and Norgate in 1875.

[3] "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 231, E. T.

What is this but an allusion to Numb. xxviii. 11–15, and a statement that Zerubbabel followed exactly the directions therein contained? Further, what is meant by the assertion, that "they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem, *as it is written in the book of Moses*"? Does not this allude to Numb. viii. 9–15? It is true that nothing is said in the Pentateuch about the "courses" of the Levites, or the "divisions" of the priests, and so far the author of Ezra i.–vi. may have expressed himself inaccurately;[1] but does he not intend to say, that Zerubbabel, in committing the service of the sanctuary to the priests and Levites, was following instructions which he found in the book of Moses, and what part of the Pentateuch can he refer to, so far as the Levites are concerned, but Numb. iii. 6–9 and viii. 9–15? Clearly, we are intended to understand that Zerubbabel guided himself in religious matters by a "book," a book which he regarded as containing "the law of Moses"—and this book comprised directions which are only found in Numbers. But this is exactly the part of the Law which it is said was not yet written. Thus Kuenen's view contradicts, at least, two passages of Ezra, and is consequently untenable. We must regard Zerubbabel as in possession of a book of the Law, which certainly comprised Numbers, and, if so, probably all the "priestly ordinances"—and which therefore may have been, and probably was, the Pentateuch.

But the possession of the Pentateuch would not bind Zerubbabel to introduce immediately, and force into active observance, all the vast complicated system there laid down, but which for nearly seventy years had passed into desuetude. To restore such a system would necessarily be a work of time—to attempt to restore it until the keystone of the whole—the Temple-worship—had been re-instituted, would manifestly have been futile, if not impossible. Zerubbabel showed his leaning towards a restoration by his celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the year of his return, and of the Passover in the year that he finished the building of the Temple; but it may well be that he did not carry the work out much further. Direct evidence is lacking; but the condition of things on the arrival of Ezra, and later under Ezra and Nehemiah, seems to have been such as to raise a doubt whether much of the Mosaic Law had not been allowed to con-

[1] "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 209.

tinue in abeyance down to the time of Nehemiah's governorship, whether, in fact, anything more was done by Zerubbabel towards the establishment of the Mosaic legislation than is actually recorded in Ezra and Haggai, or suggested by what is there recorded. In that case, all that we should have to ascribe to him would be the restoration of the Temple service, the re-establishment of the priests and Levites in their old position with respect to it, the re-enactment of the laws respecting the three "set feasts" (Ezra iii. 5), the renewal of the observances at the beginning of each month, regulations with respect to free-will offerings (ibid.), and some distinctions between what was clean and unclean, including especially the re-enactment of the law that "whoso touched the dead body of any man should be unclean seven days" (Numb. xix. 11; Hag. ii. 13).

Zerubbabel's governorship did not perhaps continue very long beyond the date of his completion of the Temple. He had then held his office for above twenty years, and was probably at least sixty years old. His special work (Zech. iv. 9) was done, and he may either have died in the course of nature, or have been superseded by some other governor. It does not appear that he was succeeded by any native Judæan prince, whether of the family of David, or of any other. The Syrian satrap, or some specially appointed officer of less rank, held the civil government of the Judæan province (Neh. iii. 7; v. 15), and was answerable to the Persian king for its tribute, and for its tranquility. Under these circumstances the sole direction of religion naturally fell to the high priest,[1] and this naturally produced an exaltation of the high priestly office. Even under Zerubbabel, the true heir to the royal honours of David (1 Chron. iii. 10–19), Joshua, the son of Josedech, had held an unprecedentedly high position. He had had a "fair mitre" set upon his head (Zech. iii. 5), and a crown of silver and gold given him (ibid. vi. 11); he had been saluted as "the Branch" (ibid. ver. 12), an epithet assigned elsewhere only to the Messiah (Isa. iv. 2, xi. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5, xxxiii. 15), and had had his name constantly coupled with that of the governor (Ezra iii. 8, v. 2; Neh. xii. 1; Hag. i. 12, 14, ii. 2, 4), once even placed before it (Ezra iii. 2). When Zerubbabel passed away, and no Davidic prince succeeded him, the power and dignity of the high priest at once rose consider-

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 113.

ably.[1] He became the highest *native* authority; he was the representative of the nation to the governor, and to the Persian State. Neighbouring princes recognized him as their equal, and were not unwilling to contract affinity with him (Neh. xiii. 4, 28). He "found a firm support in the comparatively large number of the priests, Levites, and other officers of the Temple, and must have had great influence as their head alone, irrespectively of the might and honour attributed to him by the whole nation."[2] He stood over against the Persian governor, as a sort of counterbalancing authority, and possessed not merely a spiritual jurisdiction, but a considerable temporal power.

With the high priest occupying so lofty an eminence, it was to be expected that the subordinate orders of the hierarchy should also make an advance; and accordingly we seem to find, when Jewish history is reopened to us (in Ezra vii.) after a blank of nearly sixty years, that the priests and Levites are of more account in the state than in the days of old, receive more frequent mention (ibid. vers. 7, 13, 24, viii. 15–20, 29, 33, ix. 1, x. 5, 18–23; Neh. iii. 1, vii. 1, 39–43, 73, viii. 7, 11, 13, ix. 4, 5; &c.), and have more important duties assigned them (Neh. viii. 7, ix. 4, 5, xii. 30–42). Sacerdotalism, if we may use the word, casts its shadow over the Jewish state from the time of the death, or supersession, of Zerubbabel. A Hagiocracy establishes itself, which, resting on the mere outward fact of descent, and feeling its privileges to be therefore unassailable, makes light account of that inward spiritual holiness which is the real qualification for high office and influential position. The higher life ceases to be the object of the aspirations of the sacerdotal orders. A spiritual numbness seems to fall upon them.[3] Their lips even cease to "keep knowledge" (Mal. ii. 7). Having "departed out of the way," they "cause many to stumble," and bring down on their heads the rebukes of Ezra (Ezra x. 10) and Malachi (Mal. ii. 1–9).

The decline of religion could not stop with the priests and Levites. A nation will never be much better than its leaders. The benumbing influence, which had crept over the sacerdotal orders, shortly extended itself from them to the people at large. Though, no doubt, there were many exceptions, yet it is evident that the bulk of the nation, in the sixty years which separated

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 213. [2] Kuenen, *l. s. c.*
[3] Ewald's "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 66.

Zerubbabel's governorship from Ezra's, slackened in their zeal for religion, became sluggish and indifferent, in the language of Scripture, "dealt treacherously with Jehovah," and "profaned the covenant of their fathers" (Mal. ii. 10, 11). The nobles grew self-seeking and oppressive (Neh. v. 1–13; Zech. vii. 10, 11), the people generally lukewarm in prayer (Zech. viii. 21), formal in other religious observances (ibid. vii. 5), lax in conduct (ibid. viii. 16, 17), and disposed to allow their peculiar tenets and usages to be merged and swallowed up in the sea of surrounding heathenism. The wide-spread practice of intermarriage with foreign wives—Moabite, Ammonite, Samaritan, Philistine (Neh. xiii. 23, 28)—is indicative of a growing laxity and carelessness which boded ill for the future of the nation, which made it probable that "the individuality of Israel, and Israel's religion, would be gradually effaced, and the great results already obtained in the domain of religion given up and lost."[1] A physical intermixture with the neighbouring tribes and nations would have been almost certainly followed by a religious syncretism—in which all the better features of Judaism would have been swamped; and the pure Faith, which had hitherto resisted all hostile influences, would have perished.

It must be remembered that the Judæan community possessed at this time no definite sacred Book. There was the Pentateuch, indeed, as we believe, almost in its present form; but besides the Pentateuch, there was a floating mass of prophecy, psalmody, and sacred history, not yet collected into a volume, not yet stamped by any authority, not yet separated off by any definite line from other merely human compositions. "Many of the writings," as Kuenen observes, "which were afterwards to occupy a place of honour in their sacred literature, were in existence, but they were scattered here and there, and were not acknowledged by all; as yet they were without the stamp which they required before they could pass as law, and rule the further development of the life of the nation."[2] There was thus no absolute "Rule of Faith"—no "Canon of Scripture" to direct and constrain the conscience—no single acknowledged standard whereto all were bound to conform, and departure from which was manifest apostacy.

And even with respect to the Law, we must conclude that it was but little known. Copies were scarce, and could be pos-

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 217. [2] Ibid.

sessed by few; even these were in a tongue "not understanded of the people." Neither does it seem that the Law was, during this period (B.C. 516–445) regularly, if at all, read and expounded by the religious authorities to the nation. The only provision in the Law for such reading was that which required it once in seven years, at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. xxxi. 10–13). But it is doubtful whether even this provision was observed. There is no mention of any reading of the Law in the account given of the celebration of the Tabernacles' feast by Zerubbabel (Ezra. iii. 4). When Ezra (in B.C. 445) has the Law read and expounded (Neh. viii. 1–8), it seems to be spoken of as a new thing. Thus, it would seem to be probable that a great ignorance of the Law prevailed among the Judæan community up to the time, at any rate, of Ezra's first arrival (B.C. 457), if not even to the date of his second coming (B.C. 444).

Ezra's first visit to Jerusalem, and his short governorship—if such it may be termed—no doubt did something to stir up the slack and feeble religious life which he found still existing in the Judæan community; but it does not seem to have effected very much. The unlawful practice which he had condemned so emphatically, and had laboured to put down so energetically, very soon re-asserted itself, and inter-marriage with the heathen became once more fashionable. Eliashib himself, the high priest of the time, permitted one of his grandsons to take to wife a daughter of Sanballat, the Samaritan (Neh. xiii. 28), and Shechaniah, the son of Arah, a noble of high rank, gave a daughter in marriage to Tobiah the Ammonite (ibid. vi. 18). Meshullam, another noble, accepted as a fit husband for one of his daughters Tobiah's son, Johanan (ibid.), and other members of the Jewish community "married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab" (ibid. xiii. 23). The repentance, which Ezra's passionate tears and earnest pleading had brought about, was short-lived; the danger which his efforts had averted, recurred; and at the same time there was, as might have been expected, a general decay of religious fervour, and a return to the laxity and deadness which had characterized the period between B.C. 516 and B.C. 458.

Thus Nehemiah, on his establishment in the governorship of Judæa, found religion in a very unsatisfactory condition. There was "a form of godliness without "the power thereof" (2 Tim. iii. 5). The Temple serv ce was established; the "set feasts"

were observed; the "new moons" were duly honoured; the priests and Levites executed their appointed offices, the nation acknowledged for its God Jehovah, and Jehovah only; but the vital spirit of religion was absent. The priests, instead of honouring God in their hearts, "despised" Him (Mal. i. 6); they found the Temple service "a weariness" (ibid. ver. 13); the Levites "corrupted the covenant of Levi" (ibid. ii. 8); the nobles oppressed and ground down the people (Neh. v. 1–9); the people dishonoured God by offering the worst of their cattle in sacrifice (Mal. i. 8); the very high priest, Eliashib, was not on the side of those who desired the strict observance of the Law, and the maintenance of a wall of separation between God's people and their heathen neighbours, but sympathized with the party of the lax and indifferent, favoured the mixed marriages, and even allowed them in his own family (ibid. xiii. 28). "The position of Israel's religion was," as Kuenen observes, "most critical";[1] and, if no rescue had come, its continued existence was, to say the least, doubtful.

[1] "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 218.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRST REFORMATION OF RELIGION UNDER NEHEMIAH.

Reappearance of Ezra—His importance—Part in the reformation assigned to him—Time chosen for inaugurating it—Preparations made—The reading of the Law on the first day of Tisri—The reading on the second day and its effect on the people—Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles—Proclamation of a Fast-day, and further reading of the Law, followed by penitential service—The people called on to renew the Covenant, consent—Nature of the renewal—Further obligations undertaken—Probable feelings of Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH'S first reformation of religion was effected in conjunction with a colleague. We have already pointed out the probability that, on fully realizing the difficulties of the religious problem, and the danger, which was involved in it, of the entire collapse of the Jewish state, he made an application to Artaxerxes to send him a coadjutor, and expressed a wish that the person selected for the office should be Ezra.[1] He may have been personally acquainted with the great scribe at the Persian court, and have there appreciated his ability and character; or he may have merely heard, after his arrival at Jerusalem, of the influence for good which Ezra had exercised over the Jewish people during the short term of his governorship, and have concluded, from the accounts given him, that he could have no better assistant. In either case, it would be with extreme satisfaction that he would greet Ezra's appearance upon the scene of his former labours, and invite his co-operation in the work of religious reform, which he saw to be necessary. Nehemiah, we must remember, was a layman,[2] and could not expect that

[1] See above, p. 45

[2] *Supra*, p. 103.

his interference with religion would be looked upon with a friendly eye by either of the sacerdotal orders. He needed the support of a priest, and a priest of high position and commanding influence, to give the sanction of ecclesiastical authority to his reforms, and procure their acceptance by the bulk of the nation. Such support he was not likely to obtain at Jerusalem, where the chief ecclesiastic, Eliashib the High Priest, was an open supporter of the heathenizing party, and where the priests and the Levites were deeply involved in the amalgamation movement (Ezra x. 18–24), and smarting under a sense of injury on account of the check which the movement had received in B.C. 458–7. Ezra was in all respects, excepting official rank, the most distinguished priest of his day, being a member of the high-priestly family (ibid. vii. 1–5), high in the favour and confidence of the Persian king, eminent above all others for his learning (ibid. vers. 6, 10), and possessed of a personal influence that was extraordinary (ibid. x. 1–16). Nehemiah's desire to have him as his coadjutor was most natural, and the willingness of Ezra to lend his aid was, if he knew of the state of affairs in Judæa, equally a matter of course.

Ezra's arrival at Jerusalem did not, it is probable, precede by many weeks the commencement of the seventh month, Tisri, of B.C. 444. But it occurred sufficiently early in the year for all necessary consultation and preparation. It is evident that the two reformers had well considered and well arranged their plans before they embarked in the proceedings of the month Tisri, which had so vital an effect on the future of the Jewish nation. The whole programme, we may be sure, was thoughtfully and carefully prepared ; the priests and Levites were well instructed in what was expected from them ; the form of prayer preserved to us in Neh. ix. was drawn up ; probably, the mind of the nation was sounded and influenced ; nothing was omitted which could be of service in bringing the work designed to a successful issue. The leading part in the opening scenes was assigned to Ezra. His age, his priestly character, his known learning, and the prestige which he had acquired in his former visit to Jerusalem, would cause him to speak with an authority on religious subjects, to which Nehemiah could not have pretended. His mastery of the Law (Ezra vii. 6, 10, 12, 25) would enable him to read it, translate it into the vernacular, expound it, enforce it on men's consciences, as no other living person

could have done, not even Eliashib, if he could have been prevailed upon to lend Nehemiah his assistance. His weight with his order would be such that he could command their services, and surround himself with an imposing array of priests and Levites, willing, if not eager, to afford him their support and countenance. Moreover, his reappearance in a public capacity, after an absence of twelve years, would lend the charm of surprise and novelty to the proceedings, which would, at any rate, attract general attention to them.

It is also to be borne in mind, that Ezra, though he had doubtless offended many by his severity in B.C. 457, had also, among the better disposed of the people, an attached following, which venerated him, sympathized with him (Ezra x. 1–4), was ready to hang upon his words, and to admit his authority to enforce upon them anything which he could show to be a plain commandment of the Law.[1] At all times in Israel there was a 'remnant" of faithful men, who wished to serve God, and to do what was pleasing in His sight. On these Ezra might count; and, if he succeeded in rousing them to the point of enthusiasm, it would be not improbable that the nation generally might catch the infection, and become plastic to his touch, and ready to follow out all his directions.

Thus, Nehemiah was wise, not only in sending for Ezra, but in bringing him to the front, and thrusting himself into the background. Ezra, we may assume, acquiesced in this arrangement, being convinced of its wisdom, though it may have been a severe trial to his modesty. He undertook to act, not merely as Nehemiah's ecclesiastical adviser, but as his agent and instrument in carrying out the work of reform on which both were bent.

It was agreed that the movement should be inaugurated on the first day of Tisri (Neh. viii. 2). The day was one which was to be kept, according to the Law (Lev. xxiii. 24), as a sabbath, and on which there was to be a blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation, and a special sacrifice on the altar of burnt-offerings (ibid. vers. 24, 25). It initiated the sabbatical month—the month in which occurred the great day of atonement, and the crowning feast of the year—the feast of ingathering (Exod. xxiii. 16), or Tabernacles. The Reformers regarded it as fitting

[1] See Ezra x. 12 :—"Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do."

for their purpose. If they missed the occasion, they would have to delay for six months, before another great festival season arrived. Ezra's arrival would be then less fresh, the desire to hear him less intense; while the general expectation, which his arrival had probably excited, would have quieted down. The people had now for some time, since they had received the news of his return, been anxious to hear him; and they had even gone so far as to ask him to "bring the Book of the Law" (Neh. viii. 1) and read it, and expound it, to them. Under all the circumstances, it was determined to break ground on the very first day of the month—the "Feast of Trumpets." There would then be a gathering at the Temple to keep the feast; and, if Ezra let it be known that he was about to read and expound the Law, the gathering would be a numerous one. There can be no doubt that he did let it be known.[1] The result was, that "on the first day of the seventh month, the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street (square?) that was before the water-gate" (ibid.), and there awaited Ezra's appearance—"both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding" (ibid. ver. 2).

Everything was prepared. Ezra had had a platform of wood constructed in the square, probably at one end, and had taken his station upon it at early dawn,[2] together with thirteen other priests, six of them, with himself, occupying one side of the platform, and the remaining seven the other (Neh. viii. 3, 4). He had brought "the Book of the Law" with him, and "opened it in the sight of all the people" (ibid. ver. 5), while the people "stood up" (ibid.), in the attitude of attention and respect. Prefacing his reading with a doxology, or ascription of praise to Almighty God, whereto all the people responded by a shout of "Amen, amen" (ibid. ver. 6), he proceeded to read out such portions of the Law to the assembled multitude as he judged best, and continued his occupation from early morning to midday (ibid. ver. 3). Distributed among the people were some thirteen Levites, whose task it was to repeat, and, where necessary, to explain the words read by Ezra[3] (ibid. vers. 7, 8). The passages selected—we are not told which they were—so

[1] The preparations described in Neh. viii. 3, 4, would be a tolerable indication of what was intended.

[2] Heb. "From the light" (Neh. viii. 3).

[3] So Kuenen ("Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 226).

touched the hearts of the congregation, that they burst into a paroxysm of weeping (ibid. ver. 9)—an effect neither intended nor expected. As weeping was unsuited for the day—a high festival day—both Ezra and Nehemiah (who was also present) thought it right to interpose, and check the outbreak. The Levites seconded their efforts (ibid. ver. 11), reminding the people that it was a feast-day, a day for joy and rejoicing. The reasonableness of their exhortations was recognized; and the people, breaking up from the assembly not long after midday, returned to their several homes, and proceeded to "eat, and drink, and send portions,[1] and make great mirth" (ibid. ver. 12), with a facility that is perhaps to be envied, rushing from grief to gladness, and giving free vent to the one passion as readily as to the other.

The people must have been given to understand that they were to meet again "on the second day" (Neh. viii. 13); otherwise, as it was a day unmarked in their sacred calendar, they would have settled to their various secular occupations, and have left the Temple to the priests and Levites. But they knew that the reading of the Law was to be resumed. They therefore for the second time gathered themselves together. Ezra once more appeared before them, with the "Book of the Law" in his hand, and proceeded with his reading and exposition. We can scarcely doubt but that it was pre-arranged, that he should set before them, in the course of his reading on this day, those passages of the Pentateuch (Lev. xxiii. 34–43; Deut. xvi. 13–15) which treated of the observance of the Harvest Festival, and prescribed the manner of it. The passages caught their attention. They could not fail to know that the harvest was nearing its completion, and that, if a Harvest Festival was to be kept at all, the time for it was approaching. The festival had been kept by Zerubbabel in B.C. 536 (Ezra iii. 4), and had been included among the "set feasts" of which he commanded the continual celebration (ibid. ver. 5); if it had since fallen into desuetude (as is generally thought), it can scarcely have fallen into oblivion. As they heard the plain words of the Law, the people's conscience pricked them, that they had neglected commands so easy to be observed, and so simple and unmistakable. They therefore resolved within themselves that now, at least, they would be obedient. There was ample time for the

[1] Compare Esther ix. 19.

necessary preparations, since it was only the second day of Tisri, and the feast would not begin until the fifteenth (Lev. xxiii. 31). In the space of twelve days they could easily do all that was needful. So, with this resolve of theirs the second day ended; Ezra discontinued his reading of the Law; and the two Reformers waited to see whether the people would show a real spirit of submission and obedience, or not.

It was soon apparent that a zeal for the Law had been awakened. The people went forth day after day, and gathered, in Olivet and wherever else they could find them, boughs and branches of trees, such as the Law required, or as nearly similar as possible,[1] and conveying them to the open spaces within the city and the Temple, or to the courts and roofs of their own houses, interwove them into "tabernacles" or booths—leafy arbours, delicious at the time of year (late September or early October), sufficient screens from the sun, yet allowing the free entrance of the autumnal breeze—habitations at once commemorative (Lev. xxiii. 43) and pleasant, the more delightful from their novelty.[2] They then awaited the fifteenth day of the month, and when it arrived, kept the feast with "very great gladness (Neh. viii. 17), sitting under their booths when they were at home, and during a great portion of each day listening to the reading and exposition of the Law, which was continued by Ezra "from the first day unto the last day" (ibid. ver. 18) during the seven days of the feast, from the fifteenth until the twenty-first. The eighth day—the twenty-second of the month—was also a holy day, to be observed as a sabbath, with an offering and a solemn assembly (Lev. xxiii. 36). This also was kept "according to the manner" (Neh. viii. 18); and then the Tabernacles' Feast was over, and the people prepared to depart, and scatter to their homes.

But their dispersion was arrested. All that had hitherto been done was preparatory, and, so to speak, perfunctory; the real business, on which Ezra and Nehemiah were set, was only now about to begin. It must have been intimated to the people by authority in the course of the twenty-second, or early on the twenty-third, day of the month, that there was yet another religious function in which it was intended they should engage,

[1] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 450.

[2] "Since the days of Joshua the son of Nun, the children of Israel had not *done so*" (Neh. viii. 17).

and for which it was desired that they should wait. This function was fixed for the twenty-fourth (Neh. ix. 1). For that day a solemn fast was ordained. Once more probably, as in the days of Joel (Joel ii. 15–17), proclamation was made—"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly: gather the people; sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach." The people thus warned beforehand, when, on the twenty-fourth, they gathered in their accustomed place, were already fasting, and had put sackcloth on their bodies, and earth probably upon their heads (1 Sam. iv. 12; 2 Sam. xv. 32); they had carefully "separated themselves from all strangers" (Neh. ix. 2), so that no legal impurity might unfit them for drawing near to God. Thus prepared, they "stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (ibid.). Then the divine service, doubtless prepared and presided over by Ezra, began. The Levites "stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God, during one-fourth part of the day" (ibid. ver. 3), such passages as Ezra had appointed, passages, no doubt, provocative of repentance and remorse. Then, during another fourth part of the day, they employed themselves in confession of sins, and in worship. "Praying in a loud voice, they recalled how Jehovah had chosen Abraham, and delivered Israel out of Egypt; what proofs of His favour the nation had experienced at the Exodus, in the desert, and during the settlement in Canaan; and how it had not responded to all these benefits, but, in spite of Jehovah's repeated warnings, had fallen from bad to worse. The threatened punishment had come, and Israel had been carried off into exile. 'Yet,' they proceeded, 'in Thy great mercy thou didst not destroy them, nor forsake them, for Thou art a gracious and merciful God.' Oh! let Jehovah then take pity upon His people! Nothing had befallen them but what they themselves had provoked by their obstinacy; they had no right to complain; Jehovah was righteous and had proved Himself a faithful God, while they had dealt faithlessly with Him. But now their condition was sad and humi-

liating. 'Behold, we are slaves this day; and the land which Thou gavest unto our fathers to enjoy the fruit thereof and the good gifts thereof, behold, in that land we are slaves. If it yieldeth much—it is for the kings whom Thou hast set over us for our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure; and we are in great distress' (Neh. ix. 5–37)."[1]

So spake the Levites; and then they invited the people—no doubt, in the names of Ezra and Nehemiah, who had arranged the whole—to renew their covenant with God in the most solemn possible way, by setting their seals to a formal document, by which they bound themselves thenceforth "to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of Jehovah their Lord, and His judgments and His statutes" (Neh. x. 29). It was not now, as on Ezra's former visit, a mere engagement to observe a single precept, and to carry out the observance to the full (Ezra x. 3). It was a formal undertaking to observe and keep the whole body of ordinances which the entire Law laid down, and which had probably been all read in their hearing by Ezra, or his assistant Levites, on the first and second days of Tisri (Neh. viii. 3, 13) or during the Feast of Tabernacles (ibid. ver. 18), or on the morning of the twenty-fourth day (ibid. ix. 3). The people, wrought up to a high pitch of enthusiasm by the long course of religious observances in which they had been engaged, and which we may compare to a modern "Revival," willingly did as the Levites desired—those who belonged to the upper classes appended their seals—the rest, priests, Levites, porters, singers, Nethinim, ordinary laymen, together with their wives, and such of their sons and daughters as had attained to years of discretion, "clave to their brethren, and entered into a curse, and into an oath" (ibid. ix. 29) to do according to the words of the covenant. Thus, all equally bound themselves. The covenant of Sinai (Exod. xix. 5–8; xxiv. 7), by which Israel became God's "peculiar people" (ibid. xix. 5), was renewed, and the obligation of observing the whole Law personally undertaken by each.

That this was practically a new thing, that the people hereby revived, and made obligatory among themselves, a host of observances, from which they had been free as long back as

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 227

they could remember, may be readily allowed; but the statement that "these ordinances were now made known and imposed upon the Jewish nation *for the first time*,"[1] must be strenuously denied, rejected, and contradicted. The double fiction of a forgery of Deuteronomy, which imposed on Hilkiah the High Priest in the days of Josiah,[2] and of a further forgery at this time by Ezra and his Babylonian friends of a book of priestly ordinances, corresponding to Leviticus, Numbers, and part of Exodus,[3] which imposed on the nation at large, will scarcely find acceptance with any honest and reverent reader of Scripture, who cannot fail to perceive that it contradicts the entire series of the historical sacred writings from Exodus to Chronicles, as well as many passages in the Prophets; and in the New Testament. Ezra and Nehemiah are to be regarded, not as coming from Babylonia with ordinances drawn up there, and hitherto existing only in theory, which they proceeded for the first time to carry from theory into practice,[4] but as recalling to the memory of the people the old laws, under which the nation had lived from the Exodus to the Captivity, and re-introducing, re-promulgating, and re-imposing them. Otherwise, we must regard the two great Reformers as impostors, cheating the nation into the belief that an entirely new legislation, considered by Ezra and his priestly friends to be advisable under the peculiar circumstances of the time, was in reality one communicated by God Himself to Moses. Modern German critics seem to look on truthfulness and sincerity as quite superfluous elements of moral character, and approve or condone in an Old Testament saint qualities which in a Jesuit of to-day would call forth their strongest and most earnest reprobation.

It has been already noticed, in the "Life of Ezra," that besides their general promise of obedience to the Law, in all its varied requirements, for the future, the people were called upon by Ezra and Nehemiah, at this conjuncture, to take upon themselves a certain number of special engagements on particular points of religious observance.[5] A fresh promise was made by them, that they "would not give their daughters unto

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 229.
[2] Ewald, "Geschichte des Volkes Israel," vol. i. p. 171.
[3] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. pp. 231, 232. [4] Ibid. p. 232.
[5] *Supra*, p. 49.

the people of the land, nor take the daughters of these people for their own sons" (Neh. x. 30). A fresh engagement was entered into to cease the practice of lending upon pledge (ibid. ver. 31, *ad fin.*), which Nehemiah had previously endeavoured to put down (ibid. v. 7–13), but apparently without success. Sabbath observance was specially provided for, the people engaging not even to purchase wares of any kind brought into the land for sale by foreigners on the Sabbath day (ibid.). An engagement was made that the Sabbatical year should be strictly kept (ibid.). The faithful payment of the firstfruits and of the tithes was promised (vers. 35–37), and a new obligation accepted to *bring* the firstfruits and tithes year by year to Jerusalem. Further new obligations of no small importance were, at the same time, imposed and accepted—to wit, the payment by each head of a family of the third part of a shekel yearly towards the maintenance of the Temple service (ver. 32), and the contribution of a certain amount of wood at set seasons to serve as fuel for the consumption of the Temple sacrifices (ver. 34). A further argument is furnished by the introduction of these new regulations against the theory of a "Book of priestly ordinances," now for the first time promulgated by Nehemiah and Ezra, and palmed upon the people as the work of Moses, since, if Nehemiah and Ezra were introducing a Book of their own, why did they not insert these regulations in it? Why issue them entirely on their own authority? They were not temporary regulations, but permanent ones; they were not unimportant, since the comfort of the priests and Levites, and the very continuance of the Temple service, depended on them. If Ezra and his friends composed at this time the Books of Leviticus and Numbers, why do they contain no mention of the wood-offering, or of the third part of the shekel, or of the duty of conveying the tithes and firstfruits to Jerusalem and there handing them over to the sacerdotal order? We can only account for this absence by the honesty of Ezra and Nehemiah, to whom it probably never occurred, as a possible arrangement, that they should intrude their own regulations among those of the ancient Law, much less that they should forge entire "Books" of the Law, and impose them on the nation.

Nehemiah's first reformation was now complete. With Ezra's assistance, he had made the whole law of Moses, great parts of

which had long been laid aside and even forgotten, known to the people. He had bound them to its observance. He had roused up in them a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice, whereby they had been induced to accept fresh burthens and fresh obligations without a murmur. At the same time, he had provided for the sustenance and support of the ministers of religion—the priests and Levites. He had relieved them from troublesome secular duties—the cutting and storing of the Temple fuel—the collection and conveyance of the tithes and firstfruits—and he had enabled them to devote themselves more exclusively than before to the offices of religion. He had further secured the continuance of the Temple service by a tax, which could press heavily on no man, but which would yet suffice for its purpose, and prevent the ministers of religion from having their scanty resources unduly strained in times of depression and poverty. Probably he was satisfied with the immediate result; and, if aware of the little dependence to be placed on a wave of popular feeling, and of the weakness and fickleness which were such sore defects in the Jewish character, he may yet have felt an assurance that his labours would not be wholly thrown away—that they would keep the torch of religion alight—and that, if a period of gloom supervened, still God would, in His own good time, resuscitate the dying flame, either by His own instrumentality, or by that of some other agent, and so at once assert His own honour, and prevent that religion, which at the time was the sole light of the world, from being merged in absolute darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

RECALL TO COURT, AND RESULTS OF IT.

Nehemiah's recall, and the possible grounds of it—Probable absence of Ezra from Jerusalem at the time—Eliashib comes to the front and assumes the direction of affairs—Changes made by his connivance or under his authority—Renewal of the mixed marriages—The tithe withheld from the Priests and Levites, and the choral service of the Temple interrupted—The Temple itself desecrated—The Sabbath rest infringed upon—The settlement of foreigners in large numbers at Jerusalem encouraged — Question of the re-introduction of idolatry — Motives actuating those who supported Eliashib—Universalism—Indifference and laxity—A remnant continues faithful.

NEHEMIAH returned to the Persian court in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes (B.C. 433–2), having been absent for the space of twelve years. Probably he was recalled. It was a part of the Persian system to remind provincial governors of their absolute dependence on the Crown by summoning them to the royal presence from time to time,[1] even if it were intended to restore them to their governments. It is further quite possible that Nehemiah's proceedings were placed in an unfavourable light before Artaxerxes, and that he was induced to view them with some distrust. Without supposing that he was influenced by the misrepresentations of Sanballat and his friends (Neh. vi. 6, 7), or regarded the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem, to which he had consented, as indicative of intended rebellion, we may well believe that the unusual conduct of Nehemiah in his government awoke suspicion, and caused the king's counsellors, or (if we may use the word) Cabinet, to determine upon his recall.

[1] Xen. "Hell." iii. 1, § 8.

His policy as governor might seem simply one which aimed at conciliating popular favour to himself, and in the experience of Persian statesmen it had been probably found that such conciliation was for the most part undertaken with a view to revolt. Nehemiah, during the twelve years of his governorship, had exacted nothing from the province under his charge for his own sustentation or that of the court (ibid. v. 14, 15), which, as a Persian governor, he was bound to keep up. Nay, more—he had daily received at his table, and fed at his own cost, as many as "a hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers" (ibid. ver. 17), besides those that came to him from the heathen districts in his neighbourhood. In a word, he had, as it were, kept open house for all comers, undoubtedly at a great expense,[1] and with no immediate return, so that it was natural for astute Orientals to assume that he must be looking to obtain recompense in the future, when his followers would become so numerous, and their devotion to his person so great, that he might rebel without imprudence, and seek to establish his independence. At any rate, these were grounds for suspicion, and it would be well to summon him to the capital, and call upon him to render an account of his province, and of his proceedings.

There is reason to suspect that at the time when Nehemiah—probably under these circumstances—quitted his government, Ezra was also absent from Jerusalem. He may have been summoned to court also, to give an account of his own conduct, since he might be regarded as implicated in the supposed treason of Nehemiah. Or his absence may have been fortuitous, and quite unconnected with the doings of the governor. Ezra, it must be remembered, held no official post in Palestine, and was free to come and go, as he pleased. Private affairs may have called him away, or some need of consulting the Babylonian Jews may have arisen. In any case, it is tolerably clear that he could not have remained at Jerusalem, when Nehemiah took his departure, or the disorders, of which we are about to speak, would never have arisen.

The simultaneous absence from Jerusalem of both Ezra and Nehemiah would necessarily bring Eliashib to the front. He

[1] See Neh. v. 18 :—"Now that which was prepared daily for me was one ox, and six choice sheep ; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine."

would view himself as, after Nehemiah, the natural leader of the people;[1] and though he might have hesitated to put forward his pretensions in opposition to Ezra, whose popularity and influence were so great, yet, if Ezra also had withdrawn himself, he would be likely to hesitate no longer. He would feel that the circumstances of the time constituted a call upon him to assert himself. Accordingly, he seems to have come forward, and taken the direction of affairs. Regarding Nehemiah's governorship as having come to a final end, he viewed himself as free to adopt a line of action diametrically opposed to that of the recent ruler, and proceeded to authorize a general relaxation of the Mosaic ordinances, and especially of those by which Nehemiah had set most store. Deeply involved, as he was himself, in the approval of the mixed marriages, he let it at once be understood that no further opposition would be offered to them. The people should be free to contract marriage with whomsoever they preferred, and would incur no punishment for doing so. Wives were at once taken by many of the Jews from among the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Philistines of Ashdod. They were brought to Jerusalem, and encouraged to teach their children their own forms of speech. A strange jargon began to be heard in the streets of the Holy City, where infantile tongues babbled half in the Aramaic, "half in the speech of Ashdod" (Neh. xiii. 24), and their mothers addressed them in the one language, their fathers in the other! Such seems to have been the rage for these marriages, that many Jews, carried away by it, wrongfully and cruelly put away their lawful native wives to take to themselves these aliens. "Judah hath dealt treacherously," says Malachi, "and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord, which He loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. . . . Against the wife of thy youth thou hast dealt treacherously; yet she is thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. . . . The Lord, the God of Israel, hateth putting away. . . . Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously" (Mal. ii. 11, 14, 16).

The chief support of the Reforming party in the state were the priests and Levites. In Eliashib's view it would be important to depress them, and diminish their influence. Accordingly, he seems to have connived at the non-payment of the tithes and

[1] See Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 213.

first-fruits by those that owed them, which amounted to an absolute "robbery" (Mal. iii. 8), and so impoverished the sacerdotal order, that they found themselves compelled to leave Jerusalem, and employ themselves in the cultivation of their own fields (Neh. xiii. 10). The service of the Temple must have suffered by this neglect, but to Eliashib and his party the Temple and the Temple service were of small account. They were bent on amalgamating Judaism with heathenism, or, at any rate, on such a system of mutual toleration as should lead to an ultimate union and fusion, a state of things which perhaps they thought that they saw foreshadowed in certain passages of Isaiah.[1] Meanwhile, they allowed the house of God to be "forsaken" (ibid. ver. 11)—the choral service to be discontinued —the treasuries to become empty—and the once crowded courts to remain without either ministers or worshippers.

When this condition of things had been reached, it was but a small step further in the same direction to desecrate the Temple. The store-chambers built originally to contain the tithes and first-fruits, as well as the corn, and wine, and oil for the meat-offerings and the drink-offerings, having gradually been emptied of their contents, and no fresh supplies coming in to replenish them, it occured to Eliashib, that they might as well be utilized by being turned into dwelling-houses, and that they would be very convenient residences for some of his own friends. One "large chamber" he specially prepared for his friend and connection, Tobiah the Ammonite, Nehemiah's old antagonist; and this wicked scoffer, who had done all that he could to prevent the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. iv. 7, 8; vi. 1, 12, 17-19), was actually lodged within the Temple enclosure, and allowed to make his home there (ibid. xiii. 7–9). It is not unlikely that the desecration was carried further, and that other chambers were assigned to other unbelievers.[2] Such behaviour on the part of a high priest was simply astounding; and may incline us to question whether Eliashib was not really a secret renegade from his professed religion.

It was further a part of Eliashib's policy to encourage the desecration of the sabbath. Nehemiah and Ezra having en-

[1] See ch. xlix. 13–23; lx. 1–14; lxvi. 19–23.

[2] Note that Nehemiah, when he returned to his governorship, cleansed, not merely the chamber of Tobiah, but other "chambers" also (Neh. xiii. 9).

joined its strict observance (ibid. x. 31), their successor in the government allowed it to be profaned without a protest. Under him the practice grew up of "treading wine presses, bringing in sheaves, and lading asses" (ibid. xiii. 15), and therefore, probably, of performing agricultural operations generally, on the sabbath; and a free license was given to the foreigners, who now became a considerable element in the population, to carry on their several trades openly on the "day of rest," even in the very streets of Jerusalem. "Men of Tyre," who had their fixed residence in the Holy City, "brought fish," and all manner of other commodities into the place, and "sold them on the sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem" (ibid. ver. 16). The quiet of the sabbath was disturbed, its rest destroyed, its sanctity profaned, by the chaffering of greedy traders and excited buyers in the streets and squares, the greater part of the former being foreigners, whose outlandish ways and strange speech would draw particular attention. One of the distinguishing features of Jewish life was thus obliterated, and for the time being lost; the witness for God which the strict observance of one day in seven as holy constitutes, disappeared; and outwardly, Jerusalem ceased to differ on the sabbath from any other Oriental town, being as noisy, as crowded, and as devoted to worldly business as (say) Damascus or Hamath.

The very settlement of foreigners, in large numbers, at Jerusalem was a novelty, and quite alien from the old spirit of Judaism, which Ezra and Nehemiah had laboured so hard to restore and re-establish. The "stranger" was indeed allowed to come within the "gates" of Israel (Exod. xx. 10), and was protected by the Mosaic law (Exod. xii. 49; Lev. xxiv. 22; Num. ix. 14: xv. 15, 16) from molestation or ill-usage; but he had commonly been looked on askance, regarded as an inconvenience, and excluded from all social intercourse. That Samaritans, Ammonites, Moabites, Ashdodites, and Phœnicians should be welcomed by the people of Jerusalem, received into close intimacy, intermarried with, form an element in the society, was a wholly new thing, and could scarcely have come about unless by direct encouragement on the part of persons possessed of considerable influence. It is scarcely possible to dissociate the influx of foreigners from the other measures by which Eliashib and his party were endeavouring to promote their ends, or to view it as anything but one of the means by which they sought

to secularize the Jewish religion, and fuse it with that of the surrounding heathen.

It is a grave question, whether the result of all these syncretizing efforts was not to re-introduce, to a certain extent, idolatrous practices into Jerusalem. Malachi taxes the Jews of his day with "sorcery" (chap. iii. 5), and sorcery was very usually connected with the worship of strange gods (Isa. ii. 6–8; xlvii. 9–13). Nehemiah, in warning against the mixed marriages, cites the case of Solomon, whom outlandish women "caused to sin" (Neh. xiii. 26) by "turning away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings xi. 2, 3). Kuenen observes that "the service of strange gods, which had been so seductive" to many of the Jews "in the exile, did not certainly after the exile lose all its attractiveness."[1] If actual idolatry was not brought back at this time, there was at least great "peril of idolatry." If Eliashib, and the party which supported him, had remained much longer in power, and had succeeded in completely breaking down the wall of separation so long established between Israel and the heathen, it cannot be supposed that it would have been long before idolatrous altars would have appeared once more in Jerusalem at the corners of the streets (2 Chron. xxviii. 24), if they were not introduced, as they were under Manasseh (2 Kings xxiii. 12), into the Temple itself.

It need not be supposed, however, that even Eliashib himself, much less the bulk of those who acted with him, foresaw all the probable consequences of their action, or designed the ruin of the religion of Jehovah. Rather, they were led away by a spurious liberalism, which, basing itself on the assured facts, that God was the Father of all mankind, that He cared for all, and gave supernatural aid to all, looked with aversion upon the exclusiveness and particularism which had hitherto characterized their nation, and aspired to substitute in its place a broad and tolerant spirit. Chaldæan learning had perhaps led some to look with a favourable eye on one section of the heathen world; acquaintance with Zoroastrianism had not improbably had a similar effect upon others. To such persons the policy of Ezra and Nehemiah seemed narrow, and, if we may use the term, *provincial*. They may have thought that they saw in the earlier Scriptures, as some moderns have persuaded themselves

[1] "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 218.

also,[1] "larger, nobler, and freer views"—views more worthy of an age of enlightenment. They may also have been acquainted with the writings of the Evangelical Prophet, and they may have misinterpreted them. Isaiah had spoken of an influx of Gentiles into the Jewish Church—of something which might easily have been misunderstood as an amalgamation and fusion of Judaism with heathenism. "Lift up thine eyes," he had said, "round about, and behold: *all these* gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me" (Isa. xlix. 18–23). And again—"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: *all they* gather themselves together: they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 117.

cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah ; all they from Sheba shall come : they shall bring gold and incense ; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee ; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee : they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows ? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee : for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually ; they shall not be shut day nor night ; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought" (ibid. lx. 1–11). It is easily conceivable that there were Jews who thought the time was come for these prophecies to take effect, and looked to have the narrow exclusiveness of the old Judaism superseded in their own day by a universalism that should embrace all humanity.

But it would only be a small section of the party opposed to Ezra and Nehemiah, who would rise to these lofty flights. The majority of their opponents undoubtedly stood upon a much lower level.[1] The lukewarm and indifferent, the worldly-minded and covetous, the profane and irreligious, would naturally join any party that relaxed the observances of the Law, and made life easier than it had been recently, and less hemmed-in by restraints. Their adhesion would swell the ranks of the opposition, and perhaps constitute it a majority of the nation. But there was still, most certainly, a godly "remnant," which remained firm to the Law, held aloof from heathenism, and quietly bided its time, in the confident expectation that a re-action would set in, and the religion of Jehovah be rescued from the destruction wherewith it was menaced.

[1] See Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 244.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECOND REFORMATION OF RELIGION BY NEHEMIAH.

Return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem—His struggle with Eliashib—Ejection of Tobiah's goods, and restoration of the Temple chambers to sacred uses—Recall of the Priests and Levites, re-establishment of the full Temple worship, and re-enforcement of the collection of tithe—Stop put to the desecration of the Sabbath—Renewal of the law against mixed marriages, and ejection of the heathen wives—Resistance made by Manasseh—His exile and its consequences.

AFTER an absence which is generally thought to have lasted a year,[1] but which may have been longer,[2] Nehemiah returned from the court to Jerusalem, still as Tirshatha, and with the same powers as before. His arrival, and continuance in office, must have been a deep vexation to the party of Eliashib, which had probably made strenuous efforts to prejudice Artaxerxes against him, and had imagined that their efforts would be sure to result in his permanent removal. Nehemiah, however, had evidently cleared himself from any suspicions that had been entertained respecting him by the court officials, and, in recognition of his fidelity and capacity, had been re-appointed to his old post. On his arrival, he was not long in learning how matters had been progressing in his absence, nor did he fail to perceive, that, if his authority was to be once more established, and his policy to prevail, he must lose no time in striking a blow against his rival, the high priest, and letting it be seen and known unmistakably which of the two was the stronger. He

[1] See Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 219; "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 465; &c.

[2] So Ewald, "Hist. of Israel," vol. v. p. 160, and Bp. A. Hervey, "Dict. of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 487.

therefore attacked Eliashib in his own domain, the Temple, where, if anywhere, he was paramount,[1] had a right to give orders, and was surrounded by a strong staff of menials accustomed to do his bidding. Nehemiah went in person to the Temple, and entering the "great chamber," which Eliashib had assigned to Tobiah the Ammonite, and "prepared for him" (Neh. xiii. 7), he "cast forth"—apparently with his own hands—"all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber" (ibid, ver. 8). Then, as no one dared to resist him, he proceeded to give orders that other chambers, similarly or equally desecrated, doubtless under the same authority, should be cleansed, and restored to their proper uses (ibid. ver. 9). The chambers having been cleared of their contents, the "vessels of the house of God" were brought back and once more stored in them, together with the "meat offering and the frankincense" (ibid.) Eliashib, it would seem, offered no opposition—yielded, in fact, without a struggle—doubtless, to the dismay of his party, who must have felt at once that their cause was lost, that Nehemiah would undo all that they had done during his absence, rebuild the wall of partition which they had so nearly broken down, and establish his exclusive Judaism on a firm basis.

The restoration of the Temple chambers was followed by measures for restoring the Temple service to its full dignity and completeness. The priests and Levites were recalled from their several "fields," and arrangements were made for their due sustentation by the enforcement of the tithe system as recently modified by the Reformers. Those from whom tithe was due were required to bring at once to Jerusalem their respective quotas (Neh. xiii. 12; comp. x. 37) of corn, wine, and oil, and to deliver it over to "treasurers" newly appointed by Nehemiah—Shelemiah, a priest; Zadok, a scribe; Pedaiah, a Levite; and Hanan, the son of Zaccur, a layman—who received the tithe at their hands, deposited it in the store-chambers, and, as occasion required, distributed it to such as ministered in the Temple (ibid. ver. 13). There was a ready obedience to Nehemiah's orders. "*All Judah* brought the tithe of the corn, and of the new wine, and of the oil unto the treasuries" (ibid. ver. 12)—the Levites flocked back, and re-entered upon their old offices—the Temple courts were once more crowded—the choral anthems arose at the set times—and Nehemiah, proud of

[1] Ewald, *l.s.c.* note [1].

his success, uttered the prayer which he has put on record (ibid. ver. 14)—"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof."

This second change was not made without something of a struggle—Nehemiah, before he could effect it, had to "contend with the rulers" (ibid. ver. 11), to reproach them with allowing the house of God to be "forsaken," and perhaps to employ the tongue of Malachi to awaken their dulled consciences. It was now probably that the cutting words were spoken—"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in My house, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. iii. 8–10). Prompt and full payment of the tithe would, Malachi promised, be followed by a recompense. God would "open the windows of heaven, and pour out upon Israel such a blessing that there should not be room to receive it. He would rebuke the devourer for their sakes, and he should not destroy the fruits of their ground; neither should their vine cast her fruit before the time in the field" (ibid. vers. 10, 11). Thus the prophet did not disdain an appeal to self-interest with men whom nothing else would move to do right. Fearing lest they should lose more than they gained by a further withholding of the tithe, the nobles, who were no doubt the largest landholders, ceased their opposition—the tithe, as we have seen, flowed in, and the system was allowed to establish itself: nor do we hear of any further efforts being made to shake it off.

There was even more difficulty in re-establishing the rightful observance of the sabbath. Here again Nehemiah had "the nobles" opposed to him (Neh. xiii. 17), together with a large portion of the commercial classes. Once more, he tells us, he had to "contend." "What evil thing is this," he said, "that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath" (ibid. vers. 17, 18). The commercial classes were especially troublesome. The opposition of the agriculturists was, apparently, overcome; but the traders, and especially the foreigners, who had got into the habit of making the sabbath a day of

traffic, as much as any other, and brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath "all manner of burdens"—wine, and grapes, and figs, and fish, and various other commodities—were obdurate, and refused to give up their evil practices. Nehemiah had to keep the gates of Jerusalem closed from the sunset which ushered in the sabbath to the sunset ensuing, and to have them guarded and watched by his own special servants, in order to prevent the merchants from bringing their wares into the Holy City till the sabbath was over (ibid. ver. 19). Even then the foreign merchants would not quit the vicinity of the city, but encamped without the walls, as near to the gates as they could (ibid. ver. 20), waiting to obtain an entrance the moment that the sabbath was ended. Nehemiah regarded the sabbath as desecrated, if not in the letter, yet in the spirit, by these proceedings, which drew the attention of the trading classes from the religious exercises proper for the day, to the consideration of their worldly interests. He therefore went in person to the gates near which the merchants were encamped, and rebuked them and threatened them. "Why lodge ye about the walls?" he said. "If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you" (ibid. ver. 21). The threat was enough. Nehemiah was known to be no utterer of vain words. What he threatened, he would perform. The traders, therefore, "from that time came forth no more upon the sabbath" (ibid.) By way of precaution, however, the gates were still watched, the duty of watching having been passed on from Nehemiah's own servants to the Levites (ibid. ver. 22).

But the chief struggle in this second reformation of Nehemiah's was the same as that which had engaged, and absorbed, the attention of Ezra, when he first visited Judæa[1]—the contention with regard to the mixed marriages. Here men's feelings were excited to the highest possible pitch, and here he had for open antagonists persons of the very highest rank and position. Where the culprits belonged to the common herd, he brooked no opposition. "I contended with them," he says, "and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair,[2] and made them swear by God, saying, ye shall not

[1] Ezra, chapters ix. and x.

[2] It is not perhaps quite clear, that Nehemiah means to say he did all this with his own hands. *Quod facit per alium facit per se.* Dean Stanley, however, takes the view that Nehemiah was personally engaged in the conflict ("Lectures," vol. iii. p. 134).

give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves" (Neh. xiii. 25). The bulk of Israel yielded to violence, and suffered Nehemiah to separate from them "all the mixed multitude" (ibid. ver. 3). But with persons who occupied a prominent position in the state, such a rough mode of proceeding was impossible. A son of Joiada, and grandson of Eliashib the High Priest, Manasseh by name, had not only contracted one of the prohibited marriages (ibid. x. 30), but had taken to wife a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, the chief of the foreign adversaries of Nehemiah (ibid. ii. 10, 19; iv. 1, 7; vi. 1, 2, 5, 12), and therefore a person peculiarly obnoxious to him. Nehemiah required him to put this woman away. But the man refused. Bolder than his grandfather, he met the command of the governor with a determined resistance—he would not part with his wife. Supported by a certain number of his order (ibid. xiii. 29), he defied the Tirshatha. Nehemiah on his part was equally stanch—in his capacity of civil governor, he passed on his opponent a sentence of exile (ibid. ver. 28). The recalcitrant priest did not dare to remain; but, in quitting the country, he seems to have formed a resolution, which he probably viewed as securing to him an ample revenge. This was to take refuge in Samaria with his father-in-law, and to establish there a worship and a temple, which should be permanent rivals of the worship and temple at Jerusalem, should be always open to discontented members of the Judæan community, and should present to the world a form of the Jehovistic religion less severe than that of the Judæans, simpler, and more attractive. The result was the erection, on the lofty eminence known as Mount Gerizim, of the Samaritan sanctuary of Jehovah,[1] wherein Manasseh was installed as high-priest, which continued for three centuries to be a thorn in the side of Judah, a refuge for traitors and renegades, a centre of hostility and antagonism, a constant source of trouble and difficulty. Manasseh, no doubt, from one point of view, had his revenge; but, from another, it may be questioned, whether he did not render, quite involuntarily, an important service to Judaism.

[1] I follow the view of Kuenen ("Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 236), and Dean Stanley ("Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 134), that Josephus ("Ant. Jud." xi. 7, § 2) has misdated the occurrence, which he transfers to the time of Alexander the Great. Ewald ("Hist. of Israel," vol. v. pp. 213–220) argues the question at some length.

As Kuenen remarks, "Had not Samaria stood open to the discontented Jews, perhaps the field would not have been cleared and the resistance to the new tendency" (*i.e.* to Nehemiah's reforms) "quelled so easily. Now that a refuge had been opened to them in the immediate neighbourhood, they could the sooner resolve to give up the struggle—from which they could scarcely hope to come out as conquerors."[1] The practical result is, that, with Manasseh's withdrawal, opposition ceases; the reforms are established; and the newly freed nation grows up upon the lines which Ezra and Nehemiah have laid down, not upon those which would have been preferred by Manasseh and Eliashib.

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 250.

CHAPTER IX.

FURTHER ACTION AS CIVIL GOVERNOR.

Steps taken to increase the population of Jerusalem—Census made of the inhabitants—Results, as reported to us—Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem—Preparations made—Proceedings on the day of dedication—Probable acquaintance of Nehemiah with Malachi—Services which Malachi rendered him—Higher teaching of Malachi probably beyond the grasp of Nehemiah.

THERE are some further acts of Nehemiah, as civil governor of Judæa, the date of which is uncertain, which we cannot positively assign either to the period of his former or of his later residence. One of these is his census, and the arrangement mentioned in connection with it (Neh. xi. 1–19), his transfer to Jerusalem of no small part of the population which had hitherto dwelt in the villages and country towns. It is one of the most noticeable features of the post-Captivity Judæan community, that its numbers were so small. They were insufficient to occupy more than about one-third of the old territory.[1] Jerusalem itself, up to the time of Nehemiah's coming, was thinly and sparsely inhabited (ibid. vii. 4). Nehemiah seems to have thought, on his completion of the walls, that their numbers would not suffice to man them. Accordingly he arranged that the people throughout the country districts should cast lots among themselves, "to bring one out of ten to dwell in the holy city" (ibid. xi. 1), for the purpose of permanently augmenting the population. It is uncertain whether his census was taken before or after this transfer of

[1] See the Map in Dean Stanley's 'Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. ii. opposite p. 77.

inhabitants had been effected; but the order of the narrative favours the view that it was afterwards.

Two reports of the result of the census have come down to us, which are thought to be, both of them, incomplete, and in some degree to supplement each other. According to the present text of Nehemiah,[1] there were found to be in Jerusalem, of the tribe of Levi, 1,648 adult males, of the tribe of Benjamin 928, and of the tribe of Judah 468. These last were, all of them, descendants of Perez or Pharez. According to the author of Chronicles, the Levites numbered 1,972, the Benjamites 956, and the Judahites 690; these last being, all of them, descendants of Zerah (1 Chron. ix. 3–22). Taking the two accounts separately, the Judahites are largely outnumbered, both by the Levites and the Benjamites, constituting thus the smallest element in the nation. It seems scarcely possible that this can have been the case, and yet that the Judahites should have given name both to the country and to the people. May there not be an omission, it is asked,[2] in both lists—in Nehemiah, of the Judahites descended from Zerah; in Chronicles, of those descended from Pharez? In this case the true number of Judahites would have been 1,158, and the entire adult male population of the city, counting four to a family, would have amounted, at the least, to nearly fifteen thousand. If the Chronicler's estimate of the Levites and Benjamites be preferred to that found in Nehemiah, it would have exceeded sixteen thousand.

The census did not extend to the country districts, and thus there was no infringement of the law or rule which forbade the numbering of the people (2 Sam. xxiv. 3, 10). It must, however, have been easy to form a tolerably near estimate of their number by multiplying by ten the recent addition to the population of Jerusalem (Neh. xi. 1). Unfortunately, we are not told what was the amount of this recent addition; but probably we shall not be guilty of any serious error, if we reckon the country people at double the population of the capital, and regard the entire population of Judæa at this time as a little under fifty thousand souls. Those who returned from the Captivity under Zerubbabel and Ezra had amounted to

[1] Neh. xi. 6–19.

[2] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 458

48,480. The circumstances of the country subsequently had not been favourable to any appreciable increase.

Another act of Nehemiah's, which it is difficult to date with any certainty, is his dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. Antecedent probability would be strongly in favour of its having followed closely the completion of the work of restoration by the hanging of the gates in the gate-towers (Neh. viii. 1) ; and guided by this probability, recent historians of Israel have, for the most part, assigned it to the period of Nehemiah's first residence in Jerusalem, and attached it closely to the termination of the work of building.[1] But the position of the narrative in the Book of Nehemiah, and the close *nexus* between chaps. xii. and xiii. militate against this view, and seem to fix the date to a time subsequent to Artaxerxes' thirty-second year, when Nehemiah had paid his visit to the court, and taken up his residence in Jerusalem for the second time.[2] To account for the long delay—a delay of at least twelve years —it has been suggested, that perhaps Nehemiah required an express authorization from the Persian king before conducting so august a ceremony, and therefore deferred it till he had, by personal representations and arguments, won the monarch's assent.[3]

The ceremony was the complement of an act performed twelve years previously, when the restoration of the wall was first taken in hand. At that time "Eliashib the high priest, with his brethren the priests" (Neh. iii. 1) had no sooner engaged in building their portion of the wall, than they "sanctified it" by a formal ceremony of consecration, whereby they placed it under the protection of God. Nehemiah was now bent on completing what they had so well begun. Summoning the Levites "out of their places" (ibid. xii. 27)—that is, out of the various cities and villages which they occupied in Judah and Benjamin (ibid. xi. 36)—he "brought them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness," and gave them the instructions necessary for the performance of their sacred task. They had "come up from their country districts, with their full array of the musical instruments which still bore

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 158 ; Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 128.

[2] So Bp. Arthur Hervey in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 487.

[3] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. iii. p. 462.

the name of their royal inventor"[1]—cymbals, psalteries, and harps—the trained minstrels had also been "summoned from their retreats on the hills of Judah and in the deep valley of the Jordan. They all met in the Temple Court. The blast of the priestly trumpets sounded on one side; the songs of the minstrels were loud in proportion on the other. It is specially mentioned that even the women and children joined in the general acclamation, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off (ibid. ver. 43). Perhaps the circumstance that leaves even yet a deeper impression that this tumultuous triumph is the meeting which on this day, and on this day alone, Nehemiah records in his own person, of the two men who in spirit were as closely united—he himself so heading one procession, and Ezra the Scribe as heading the other."[2]

First of all, the priests and Levites had to "purify themselves" by careful ablutions (Exod. xix. 10) and perhaps other ceremonies, so that they might be fit to take part in the proceedings: then they had to purify, probably by the sprinkling of water (Numb. xix. 13–19), "the people, the gates, and the wall" (Neh. xii. 30). After this, the two processions were formed. Nehemiah in person marshalled them (ibid. ver. 31). Each procession consisted of a number of priests with trumpets, of a body of Levites with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, of "half the princes of Judah" (ibid. vers. 32, 40), and of a certain number of the common people (ver. 34). They took their station upon the western wall of the city, probably near the modern Jaffa Gate, and at a given signal commenced their march. Those on the right, under the leadership of Ezra (ibid. ver. 36), proceeded southward, and then eastward, along half the western and the whole of the southern wall, after which they faced northward, and proceeded along the eastern wall to about the middle of it. Those on the left, under the guidance of Nehemiah himself (ibid. ver. 38), took the opposite direction. Facing northward they marched along the western wall to its northern extremity, then turning eastward pursued the line of the northern wall, and finally proceeded southward along the eastern wall till they met the other procession. Here both processions found themselves in the immediate vicinity of the Temple and directly opposite to it. The long line of both columns had, no doubt, been cheered with music from time to

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 129. [2] Ibid.

time as they went on their way; but now, as the two companies came to a stand, the whole body of the singers broke out in a burst of song, chanting loudly, "with Jerahiah their overseer" (ibid. ver. 42), and praising the name of God. A portion of the priests meanwhile descended from the wall to the area of the Temple, and there in the Great Court, in the sight of all their brethren, offered sacrifice upon the altar of burnt-offering on behalf of the nation. "That day," says Nehemiah, "they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced" (ibid. ver. 43). "By the law almost all things were purged with blood; and without shedding of blood was there no remission" (Heb. ix. 22). The sanctification of the wall would have been incomplete without a sacrifice, which was probably at once a thank-offering, and a sin-offering, an expression of gratitude to God for His protection during the completion of the work, and an offering of expiation for the sins and short-comings of those engaged in accomplishing it.

It was also, probably, in the later portion of his Civil Governorship that Nehemiah was brought into contact with the last of the prophets, Malachi, a man thoroughly after his heart, and one who did him yeoman's service in the struggle wherein he was engaged during this period. Ezra was, apparently, for some considerable time absent. It was a great thing for Nehemiah to be supported, assisted, and encouraged by an inspired prophet, one generally admitted by the nation to possess the divine gift, and one who was ready to use it boldly on all fitting occasions. "With its clear insight into the real wants of the time, its stern reproof even of the priests themselves, and with its bold exposition of the eternal truths, and of the certainty of a last judgment, the brief composition of Malachi closes the series of prophetic writings contained in the canon in a manner not unworthy of such lofty predecessors."[1] Malachi stood to Nehemiah, as Haggai and Zechariah to Zerubbabel and Joshua nearly a century earlier.[2] As those former chiefs of the nation "prospered" mainly "through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra vi. 14). so now Nehemiah was greatly helped by the one prophet of the time—the last link in the long

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 176.
[2] Stanley, "Lecture son the Jewish Church, vol. iii. p. 15[illegible]

chain—who, whether actually named Malachi or no,[1] was of a certainty "God's messenger," and bore to the nation, in a form adapted to the period, the heavenly message, so often delivered, down the long course of the ages, by those who had preceded him in his holy office. Malachi denounces, with a vigour worthy of Isaiah himself, those special sins against which Nehemiah was never tired of contending—the intermarriage with heathen women, involving, as it too often did, repudiation of innocent and loving Jewish wives, whose unhappy lot caused them to bathe the altar with their tears (Mal. ii. 13)—the withholding of tithes and offerings, which he regards as absolute robbery of the Almighty (ibid. iii. 8, 9)—the oppression of the poor (ibid. ver. 5), against which Nehemiah so strenuously exerted himself (Neh. v. 6–13)—the demoralization of the priesthood (Mal. i. 6; ii. 1–10), patent in the cases of Eliashib (Neh. xiii. 7, 8) and Manasseh (ibid. ver. 28)—and the general irreligion and laxity (Mal. i. 13, 14; ii. 17; iii. 5, 7, &c.). He re-echoes Nehemiah's condemnations, but even in stronger terms. He tells the priests that they "despise," and "profane, God's name" (ibid. i. 6, 12), that they "are departed out of the way" (ibid. ii. 8), have "corrupted the covenant of Levi" (ibid.), have "caused many to stumble" (ibid.), and have been "partial" in their exposition of the Law (ibid. ii. 9). He calls the people "thieves and robbers" (ibid. iii. 8, 9), "adulterers, sorcerers, false swearers" (ibid. iii. 5), "treacherous dealers" (ibid. ii. 14), "committers of abomination in Israel and in Jerusalem" (ibid. ii. 11). He tells them that they are "cursed with a curse" (ibid. iii. 9).

But Malachi is not content merely to upbraid and denounce. He takes higher flights. He looks forward to the coming, first of a messenger, a forerunner, who will "prepare the way before the Lord" (Mal. iii. 1), who will "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (ibid. iv. 6); and then of a Greater than he—even "the Lord" Himself—who will "suddenly come to His temple" (ibid. iii. 1), and "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (ibid. iii. 3). He sees "the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings" (ibid. iv. 2), and the faithful greet Him, and go forth in His strength, conquering and to conquer, and "tread down the

[1] On this point, see Ewald's "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 177, note [2].

wicked as ashes under the soles of their feet" (ibid. iv. 3). He sees, beyond all this, a "great and dreadful day" (ibid. iv. 5)—a "day that shall burn as an oven," when "all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, and leave them neither root nor branch" (ibid. ver. 1). The visions which open upon him are not perhaps wholly distinct and clear; but, interpreting them in the light thrown upon them by later events, we cannot doubt that they were foreshadowings of the "angel of moral restoration,"[1] who did "arise and recall—even in outward garb and form—the ancient Tishbite, last seen in the same valley of the Jordan,"[2] and did prepare the way for the coming of One greater than he—of that coming itself—and of that final day of most just Judgment when the Lord Christ shall descend from heaven the second time, "with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. iv. 16) to judge both the quick and the dead. Whether Nehemiah understood this portion of the prophet's message, whether he was able to rise to these lofty heights, is perhaps doubtful; but, at any rate, Malachi afforded him in the later years of his governorship the comfort and sympathy which one earnest and godly man cannot fail to lend to another, when circumstances bring them together in a time of trial and difficulty.

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 159.
[2] Ibid.

CHAPTER X.

LEGENDS RESPECTING NEHEMIAH.

Nehemiah made contemporary with Zerubbabel—Reference to him in the Book of Enoch—Expansion of the legend—Nehemiah regarded as the builder of the Second Temple—Legend of the Sacred Fire, as told in the Second Book of Maccabees—Intention of the legend—Rival legend respecting Ezra—Legend of Nehemiah's Library, and collection in one of the Jewish sacred Books—Rapid waning of Nehemiah's fame, and occupation of his place by Ezra—Nehemiah's hopes not disappointed.

IT was early believed by pious Jews, that Nehemiah returned with Zerubbabel, and took part in the restoration of the Altar and the Temple. About B.C. 130–128 this belief appears in the "Book of Enoch,"[1] which is confidently assigned to that period.[2] It probably originated in the double statement of Ezra (Ezra ii. 2) and Nehemiah (Neh. vii. 7), that among the exiles who accompanied Zerubbabel from Babylon was a person of the name. The "Nehemiah" of these passages being assumed to be the son of Hachaliah, his coming with Zerubbabel followed of necessity, and his participation in that leader's special works became highly probable. There may also have been a confusion between the completion of the Temple and the completion of the walls; and as none could gainsay that Nehemiah "raised up for Israel the walls that were fallen, and set up the gates and the bars, and raised up their ruins again" (Ecclus. xlix. 13), it was not surprising that he should have been confused with the builder of the second Temple, or at any rate have been thought to have assisted him.

[1] Chap. lxxxix. 72; ed. Dillmann.

[2] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 346.

But, in course of time, the legend, as is the nature of legends, grew and expanded itself. The author of the Second Book of Maccabees, writing about B.C. 100–50 "accepted a very free account of Nehemiah as the founder of the new sanctuary, which was doubtless to be read already in works current in his day."[1] Discarding altogether any mention of Zerubbabel or Joshua, he ascribed to Nehemiah alone the building of the Temple and the altar (2 Macc. i. 18). He tells us further, that at the great disaster in Zedekiah's reign, when the magnificent Temple of Solomon was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldees, Jeremiah the prophet (ibid. ii. 1) and "the priests that were then devout, took fire of the altar privily, and hid it in an hollow place of a pit without water, where they kept it sure, so that the place was unknown to all men" (ibid. i. 19). The concealment endured for "many years" (ibid. ver. 20)—he does not venture to say how many—and then Nehemiah, having been sent by the king of Persia to undertake the governorship of Judæa, "did send of the posterity of those priests that hid the fire" (ibid. ver. 20), who were supposed to know the secret, to bring it up again. The sacred embassy went, but reported on their return that they had been unable to find any fire in the pit. All that they had succeeded in discovering was some water mingled with mud; and this they had left behind them, regarding it as useless. But the governor was of a different opinion. "Return," he said, "to the pit, and draw of the water, and bring it." They did as they were required, and brought of the muddy water to the Temple at the time of sacrifice. Nehemiah was present, and at once commanded them to sprinkle the sacrificial wood, and the victims laid on it, with the water which they had drawn from the pit whereto tradition had pointed.[2] Then, a marvellous result followed—only paralleled by the miracle wrought, once upon a time, by Elijah upon Mount Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 33–38). The water had been poured out—suddenly the sun, which had been hitherto obscured by dense clouds, burst out into full splendour, and at once the wood and the offering were kindled into a great blaze of fire (2 Macc. i. 21, 22). Hereupon the priests, prepared to perform

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. p. 162.

[2] Perhaps the modern *En-Rogel*, called also "the well of Nehemiah" (Robinson, "Researches in Palestine," vol. i. p. 490; Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 135, note 3).

their part, broke out into prayer—"both the priests and all the rest, Jonathan" (we are told) "beginning" (ibid. ver. 23). "O Lord, O Lord God," they said, "Creator of all things, who art fearful, and strong, and righteous, and merciful, and the only and gracious King, the only Giver of all things, the only just, almighty, and everlasting, thou that deliverest Israel from all trouble, and dost choose the fathers, and sanctify them: receive the sacrifice for Thy whole people, Israel, and preserve Thine own portion, and sanctify it. Gather those together that are scattered from us, deliver them that serve among the heathen, look upon them that are despised and abhorred, and let the heathen know that Thou art our God. Punish them that oppress us and with pride do us wrong. Plant Thy people again in Thy holy place, as Moses hath spoken" (ibid. vers. 24–29). Upon the prayer followed psalms of thanksgiving, which were sung by the priests (ibid. ver. 30). When the service was over, and the sacrifice consumed, Nehemiah, seeing that some of the water brought from the pit still remained in the vessel that had been used for bringing it, commanded that it should be poured out upon the stone pavement. Upon this, there was a second miracle. Bright flames leaped up from the stones high into the air, but for a short time only. Seemingly outshone by the dazzling glow of the altar fire, they faded after a while and sank into darkness (ibid. ver. 32). When the king of Persia heard of the marvels that had taken place, he gave orders that the sacred spot should be fenced in, and so preserved from desecration. The writer adds, that Nehemiah called the holy liquid which had been found in the pit "naphthar"—a word in which it is impossible not to recognize the "naphtha" (*Petroleum*) of modern commerce. This was corrupted by the vulgar into *nephi*.

Such is the legend. Its essential motive is clearly to enforce and establish as a fact the identity of the sacred fire which was kept alight on the altar of burnt sacrifice in the second Temple with that holy flame, kindled from heaven at the dedication of the first Temple by Solomon (2 Chron. vii. 1), which was believed by all to have been kept alight, at any rate till the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. It was regarded as of primary importance in the Zoroastrian system that a perpetual flame should be maintained on the fire-altars upon the mountain-tops, where the Magian priesthood ministered and

performed their sacrifices.[1] The author of the legend did not choose that he and his co-religionists should seem, in this respect, to fall short of their Zoroastrian masters. If the flame on their altars were eternal, so should the flame on his be. To enforce the belief which he desired to see established, he deemed it necessary to relate a very circumstantial story. Unfortunately, here his ignorance of history and chronology betrayed him into blunders. But his contemporaries were as ignorant as himself, and his blunders probably remained undetected. His legend found general acceptance; and, so late as the early part of the seventeenth century, the Frank Christians of Jerusalem pointed out to travellers the well at the confluence of the Hinnom and Kedron valleys as "the well of Nehemiah and of the fire."[2]

But another tale was told, with the same motive for its basis, by others. Ezra, it was said,[3] on his arrival at Jerusalem, discovered in the vaults of the Temple a censer full of the sacred fire which had formerly burned in the sanctuary. Who had hidden it away was not mentioned, or how Ezra knew it to be identical with the old sacred fire; but the story passed as true with some, and was accepted by the Christians of Ethiopia.

The author of the Second Book of Maccabees has a further legend respecting Nehemiah, who is evidently a special favourite of his, and whom he is bent on glorifying. "Nehemiah," he says, "founded a library, and gathered together in one the acts of the kings [of Israel], and of the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings [of Persia] concerning the holy gifts" (2 Macc. ii. 19). The foundation of a "library" (βιβλιοθήκη) in the middle of the fifth century by a Jew in Palestine is an anachronism perhaps pardonable in an Alexandrian Israelite of the first or second, familiar with the libraries of the Lagidæ, and ignorant that Aristotle was the first by whom such a collection was made. But the literary character ascribed to one who was little more than a blunt soldier, and essentially a man of action, indicates a want of ability to discriminate among the great men of his nation which is surprising, or a determination

[1] See "Religions of the Ancient World," p. 98.

[2] See Robinson's "Researches in Palestine," vol. i. p. 331, note *.

[3] So Grimm, "Comment on Maccabees," in the "Exegetisches Handbuch," p. 50.

to deck out a favourite hero in borrowed plumes which is discreditable. The collection alluded to is clearly that of Jewish sacred writings made by Ezra,[1] in which it is impossible to suppose that Nehemiah took any part, though he may have given it the sanction of his authority. The "epistles of the kings of Persia" are, apparently, those rescripts which are to be found in the Book that bears Ezra's name, in the first, sixth, and seventh chapters. Nehemiah's own writings contain no such document, though he informs us that he received several such epistles, as credentials from his royal master (Neh. ii. 7–9).

Among the later Jews Nehemiah's fame seems to have waned, as that of Ezra waxed and increased. "It was Ezra especially who rose higher and higher in importance as time went on, and the mere learning of the scribe grew to be the ruling power among the remnants of the ancient people, until at last he was elevated indefinitely above all the limits of time. He was regarded as the wonderful master of all the learning of the scribes, as the restorer of the collection of the holy books, and the author of many like them, and at last as master, to be put on the same level of lofty jurisdiction with Moses, empowered to decide on every question concerning the holy scripture, and even as the originator of the Masôra of the Bible, and all the reading marks, points, &c. At the same time, many were disposed to consider him identical with the prophet Malachi. Nay, there were certain bold writers in the century of the birth of Christ, whose reverence for him rose so high that they reckoned him, like Elijah, one of the Immortals who retain in paradise perpetual youth, and reappear on earth, something like the Phœnix, at great crises." [2]

Meanwhile, Nehemiah sank into oblivion. He is not mentioned in the New Testament. "In the later traditions, alike of Jew, Arab, and early Christian, Ezra the scribe entirely takes his place." [3] If his frequent prayer—"Think of me, my God" (Neh. v. 19)—"Remember me, O my God" (ibid. xiii. 14)—"Remember me, O my God, for good" (ibid. xiii. 31)—were rightly interpreted as "a prayer for posthumous fame," [4] we

[1] See above, page 59.
[2] Ewald, "Hist. of Israel," vol. v. pp. 163, 164.
[3] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 141.
[4] So Stanley, "Lectures," vol. iii. p. 135.

must say of him, that his wishes were doomed to disappointment; but perhaps we may give his words another, and loftier, sense, which will relieve us from so painful a conclusion. It was for Divine remembrance, not for human remembrance, that Nehemiah pleaded.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARACTER AND WORK.

Opinions of Ewald, Stanley, and Bishop A. Hervey, on the character of Nehemiah—The most striking feature of it, his piety—Other principal features—Nehemiah's patriotism—His activity and energy—His prudence and caution—His courage, physical and moral—His unselfishness, liberality, and generous hospitality—Defects in his character—Displays of passion—Vindictiveness—Self-complacency—Nehemiah's work twofold, material and moral—Restoration of Jerusalem—Reformation of Religion.

THE character of Nehemiah has provoked the admiration of all those who have made it their study. "Nehemiah," says Ewald, "resembled Ezra in his fiery zeal, in his active spirit of enterprise, and in the piety of his life. A younger contemporary of Ezra, he was almost unconsciously seized by the better impulses of the time so strongly stirred by him; and, in spite of the very different and purely secular nature of his labours, he yet co-operated most effectually with him, and completed all which was still wanting, and which could hardly be supplied except by a strong secular arm. His relation to Ezra was much like that of Joshua to his older contemporary, Moses."[1] "Ezra and Nehemiah (for in some respects they are inseparable)," remarks Dean Stanley,[2] "are the very impersonations of that quality which Goethe described as the characteristic by which their race has maintained its place before the judgment-seat of God—the impenetrable toughness and persistency which constitute their real strength as the Reformers of their people. Reformers in

[1] Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. v. pp. 147, 148.
[2] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. pp. 137, 138.

the noblest sense of that word they were not. . . . They moved within a narrow, rigid sphere. . . . But within that narrow sphere Ezra and Nehemiah were the models of good Reformers. They set before themselves special tasks to be accomplished, and special evils to remedy, and in the doing of this they allowed no secondary or subsidiary object to turn them aside. They asked of their countrymen to undertake no burdens, no sacrifices, which they did not themselves share. They filled the people with a new enthusiasm because they made it clear that they felt it themselves. The scene of Ezra sitting awestruck on the ground at the thought of his country's sins, the sound of the trumpet rallying all the various workmen and warriors at the wall to Nehemiah's side, inspire us still with their own inspiration. When we read of the passion, almost the violence, of Nehemiah in cleansing the Temple, and clearing its chambers, we see the spark, although the sulphureous spark, of that same Divine flame, of which, when One came who found the house of prayer turned into a cavern of robbers, it was said (John ii. 17), 'The zeal of Thine House hath even consumed me.'" "On reviewing the character of Nehemiah," observes Bishop Arthur Hervey,[1] "we seem unable to find a single fault to counterbalance his many and great virtues. For pure and disinterested patriotism he stands unrivalled. . . . Every act of his during his government bespeaks one who had no selfishness in his nature. All he did was noble, generous, high-minded, courageous, and to the highest degree upright. But to stern integrity he united great humility and kindness, and a princely hospitality. As a statesman, he combined forethought, prudence, and sagacity in counsel, with vigour, promptitude, and decision in action. In dealing with the enemies of his country, he was wary, penetrating, and bold. In directing the internal economy of the state, he took a comprehensive view of the real welfare of the people, and adopted the measures best calculated to promote it. In dealing, whether with friend or foe, he was utterly free from favour or fear, conspicuous for the simplicity with which he aimed only at doing what was right, without respect of persons. But in nothing was he more remarkable than for his piety, and the singleness of eye with which he walked before God. He seems to have undertaken everything in dependence upon God,

[1] See the "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 488.

with prayer for His blessing and guidance, and to have sought his reward only from God."

In our opinion, the most striking feature in Nehemiah's character is this last mentioned one, his piety, and especially his prayerfulness at all times, and under all circumstances. It was natural enough, that, on hearing from his brother Hanani of the extreme, affliction and reproach, in which Jerusalem, the place of his fathers' sepulchres (Neh. ii. 3), lay, he should betake himself to prayer, in order to implore God's mercy upon his countrymen, and his blessing on the plan which he had at once devised for helping them (ibid. i. 11); though even then the earnestness of his prayer, and its long continuance "day and night" (ibid. i. 6), are most remarkable. Four months of ceaseless weeping and praying—if his words are thus rightly understood[1]—would seem to be an unparalleled length of intercession, and must be pronounced altogether extraordinary. But to us even more strange and more admirable seem those sudden short prayers which Nehemiah could interject into the middle of worldly trouble and worldly difficulty, when he stood in the presence of the king and queen at the Persian court, or when he laboured at the wall and his enemies seemed just about to attack him, or when self-satisfied conspirators assured him that his hands were about to be weakened and his work to cease, or when the business of reformation pressed upon him, and at every turn fresh obstacles were to be met. See him about to make his petition to Artaxerxes for a permission very rarely asked, and still more rarely accorded,[2] permission to absent himself from the court for years in order to render help to a poor, down-trodden, foreign people. "For what dost thou make request?" says the great monarch, and waits for an answer; but Nehemiah does not answer till he has "prayed to the God of heaven" (Neh. ii. 4). Secretly, silently, his heart goes up to the Lord of all, beseeching His aid and blessing—the pause is but for a moment, yet in that moment how much has been done? God has been appealed to, called in—His grace and favour have been obtained—the help of His "good hand" (ibid. ver. 18) has been secured; that blessing which alone gives success has been gained. That silent, momentary, appeal to God, has acquired for Nehemiah's enterprise a support and strength

[1] See Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. iii. p. 123.

[2] See above, pp. 88, 89.

which carry it through to a successful issue, and give him his position among the great men of his nation. See him, again, toiling at the construction of the wall! He is insulted, mocked, met with jeers, and idle jests—"That which they build, even if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall" (ibid. iv. 3). And when jeers and insults have no effect, he is confronted by force. Sanballat comes in person, and Tobiah, "and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites" (ibid. ver. 7), and they are "very wroth," and "conspire all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it" (ver. 8). What is Nehemiah's resource? "We made our prayer unto our God" (ver. 9). He does not neglect human means—he arms his servants—he "sets a watch"—he makes his builders go about their work with swords girded by their sides, or with a weapon in one hand (vers. 17, 18); he has companies lying in wait with swords, and spears, and bows (ver. 13); but his dependence is not on these—it is on the "prayer" which he and his offer unto their God. Observe him again, when his adversaries have given up the idea of using force, and are substituting for it the crooked devices of cajolery and calumny, fondly hoping that they may entrap him into making a false step, and so losing his influence either with the king, or with his own people, once more prayer is his resource. "Now therefore, O God," he says, "strengthen my hands" (chap. vi. 9), and a little later, "My God, think thou upon Sanballat and Tobiah, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear" (ibid. ver. 14). Or, finally, look at him, when, upon his return from a brief visit to the Persian court, he finds all the measures which he has taken for his people's good upset, his plans subverted, a policy diametrically opposed to his own established, and his people seemingly content to have it so—when princes and Levites, and even the very high-priest himself, are ranged against him, and his enemy, Tobiah, is lodged in the very sanctuary of God (ibid. chap. xiii. 7)—when he is "grieved sore" (ibid. ver. 8), and vexed, and thwarted, and opposed on every side—see how the only result is, that from his mouth the stream of prayer flows faster and faster—"Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercies" (ibid. ver. 22)—"Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the

covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites" (ibid. ver. 29)—"Remember me, O my God, for good" (ibid. ver. 31). Living in the constant presence of God, continually feeling Him near, confident in His mercy and justice, assured that He never fails to help those who call upon Him earnestly, fervently, trustfully Nehemiah's first impulse, when he is strongly moved, is to pray—to utter to God his wishes, hopes, desires, fears, aspirations.

Nehemiah's primary conception of God was of One "great and terrible" (Neh. i. 5; iv. 14). But this idea was softened, first of all, by a general belief in His abounding mercy (ibid. i. 5), and further, by a strong and special conviction that he and his people were God's covenanted servants, whom He was bound to help and support in all their trials, afflictions, and difficulties. Spiritual help is not all that is intended. Nehemiah believes in (what moderns call) "Special Providences"—in God's influencing the mind and will of the king of Persia (ibid. ver. 11; ii. 8); in His putting wise thoughts into his own heart (ibid. ii. 12; vii. 5); in His baffling the designs of those who would injure His people (chap. iv. 15); in His breathing into the hearts of His people a spirit of joy and rejoicing (chap. xii. 43). He has himself the most unshaken confidence in God—"The God of heaven, He will prosper us," he declares on one occasion (chap. ii. 20); "Our God shall fight for us," he announces positively on another (chap. iv. 20); "The good hand of my God was upon me," he says on a third (chap. ii. 8; comp. ver. 18). God's will is the rule of life to him (chap. v. 15), and he insists that it shall be the rule of life to his subjects. "Ought ye not," he exclaims to his refractory nobles, "to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" (chap. v. 9). "Shall we then hearken unto you," again he says (chap. xiii. 27), "to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?" He makes the whole people bind themselves by a curse and by an oath, "to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do *all* the command of the Lord their God, and His judgments, and His statutes" (chap. x. 29). As Civil Governor, he advances God-fearing men (chap. vii. 2); transgressors he curses, smites (chap. xiii. 25); if they persist, punishes with exile (ibid. ver. 28).

A second main feature in Nehemiah's character is his patriotism. "The man whom the account of the misery and ruin of

his native country, and the perils with which his countrymen were beset, prompted to leave his splendid banishment, and a post of wealth, power, and influence, in the first court in the world, that he might share and alleviate the sorrows of his native land, must have been pre-eminently a patriot."[1] *Because* his people were down-trodden, *because* they were "in great affliction and reproach" (chap. i. 3), with the wall of their city "broken down," and the gates "burned with fire" (ibid.), *because* they were "feeble" (chap. iv. 2), and despised (chap. i. 19), and poor, and ground-down, and oppressed (chap. v. 1–8), therefore his heart clave to them, and he was drawn by the cords of love to cast in his lot with theirs, to throw up a position of ease, wealth, and dignity, and exchange it for one of ceaseless toil, of no small danger, and of exposure to scorn and reproach. The deep sympathy with the men of his race which inspires the true patriot is unmistakably shown in the mourning, and weeping, and fasting for days or weeks, when he first heard of their distress (chap. i. 4); in the earnest prayer in which he associated himself, and "his father's house," with the transgressors who had brought down God's judgments upon the nation (ibid. vers. 6–9); in the "sorrow of heart" which made his countenance sad, and could not be concealed from the great king (chap. ii. 1–3); in the silent, almost solitary, ride for the purpose of exploring the ruins (ibid. vers. 12–16); in the mournful words to the nobles, "Ye see the distress we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste" (ibid. ver. 17); and again in the indignant address to the enemies of Judah—"We, his servants, will arise and build; but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem" (ibid. ver. 20). What a patriotic fire burns in the prayer—"Hear, O our God, for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before Thee, for they have provoked Thee to anger before the builders" (chap. iv. 4, 5)! How deep the fellow-feeling which resounds in the battle-cry—"Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord which is great and terrible; and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (ibid. ver. 14)! Well does Nehemiah, in one of his short characteristic prayers, exclaim—"Think

[1] Bishop Arthur Hervey in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 488.

upon me, my God, for good, *according to all that I have done for this people*" (chap. v. 19). What had he not done for them? Bold to intercede for them with the king, prompt to hasten to their aid across a vast stretch of arid and dangerous country, clever to design and bold to execute the first great necessary work—the building of the city walls, stern to repel unauthorized intermeddlers with his doings, indefatigable in labour, skilful in organization, quite ready to meet force with force, and at the same time tender-hearted, deeply touched by the sufferings of the poor (chap. v. 1–13) and bent on alleviating them, within a few months of his arrival in the city, he had secured the capital against sudden assault, removed the nation's "reproach," baffled and outwitted its enemies, and at the same time found a remedy for the worst internal troubles, put down the oppression of the rich, and relieved the misery of the indigent. Few patriots have ever succeeded in doing so much in so short a time. And, as his course began, so it continued. A single-eyed, unselfish, regard for his people's best interests actuated him from first to last, whether the immediate danger to be met was defencelessness, or alienation of class from class, or general poverty, or the casting aside of wholesome restraints, or the insidious peril of gradual amalgamation with the heathen.

Very conspicuous too, and very admirable, are his activity and energy. Considering how most men love their ease, and how prone the Oriental man is, above all others, to be sluggish and apathetic, remembering, moreover, that Nehemiah was brought up in the purlieus of a court characterized by a luxury and self-indulgence rarely equalled elsewhere, and never surpassed,[1] it is most remarkable that he should have shown himself so notable an example of activity and devotion to work. As royal cup-bearer, we might have presumed that he would have been one of those luxurious mortals, of whom Sardanapalus was the Grecian type, content to wear away the whole of life in delicious idleness, or in the gratification of appetite. His activity, one might have supposed, would have been confined to delicate balancings of gold and silver goblets on taper fingers spread out in some new and captivating pose, or to graceful attitudes, the result of much study and care, when the time came for executing his office, and either handing to the king, or receiving back from him, the jewelled drinking-vessel. But the

[1] See above, pages 82, 83.

portrait presented to us contradicts all such expectations. Never was light-footed Greek, or energetic Roman, more constantly employed, more active, earnest, vigorous. He travels from Susa to Jerusalem (chap. ii. 9–11), and from Jerusalem to Susa, and back (chap. xiii. 6), as if the arduous journey of five hundred miles or more were nothing but a pleasure-trip. Within three days of reaching Jerusalem, he makes a careful survey of the ruins (chap. ii. 11–16). Then he assembles the head men, opens his design to them, plans and arranges the work. Within fifty-two days it is completed (chap. vi. 15). By constant and almost incredible exertions, by taking his full share in the labours that he exacted from others (chap. iv. 15, 21), by watchfulness both day and night (ibid. ver. 9), by fresh expedients devised to meet every new danger, by an unwearied persistence which reached to the extremity of neither himself nor his special followers ever taking off their clothes (ibid. ver. 23), he brings his enterprise to a successful issue in little more than seven weeks from the time of its inception. Does he then take a prolonged rest? No. Almost immediately he addresses himself to a new and far more arduous task than the one which he has just completed—a task which elsewhere has scarcely ever been accomplished except by a social revolution. He takes up the cause of the poorer classes, interferes between the oppressors and the oppressed, shames the rich into the relinquishment of their evil practices, extorts from them the spoil on which they have laid their greedy hands (chap. v. 11–13), and rescues the poor from the gulf of destruction, on the brink of which they were standing. Meanwhile his emissaries are searching out enslaved Jews and ransoming them (ibid. ver. 8) and restoring them to their place in the city, and he himself is daily entertaining at his table more than a hundred and fifty guests (ibid. ver. 17), while at the same time he is contending with his foes, both within and without the city (chap. vi. 2–9), frustrating their schemes, rejecting their specious overtures, not suffering himself to be turned away from whatever work he has in hand by open foes or pretended friends, by idle threats, or spurious prophecies, or artful cajoleries (ibid. ver. 10–19). The defences of the city completed by the hanging of the gates in the gate-towers (chap. vii. 1), he provides for its safe custody by the appointment of commandants, the organization of watches, and stringent rules as to the opening and shutting of the doors (ibid. vers. 2, 3). With unwearied energy

he next proceeds to take a census of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (ibid. ver. 5); and, a little later, he adds to the number by drawing into the city one out of every ten of the inhabitants of the villages and country districts (chap. xi. 1, 2). Next, he engages in what is perhaps the most difficult task of all those to which he puts his hand, the reformation of religion—the uprousing and quickening into life and vigour of the moral and spiritual natures of the people. Checked in this work by a sudden recall to court, and the necessity of travelling, in going and returning, more than a thousand miles, he hastens back as soon as he may (chap. xiii. 6), and, like a giant refreshed, plunges once more into the fierce struggle whereby alone is it possible to bring about a real and permanent improvement. Opposition meets him everywhere, but he combats it with all the vigour and all the tenacity of purpose which he displayed twelve years previously. Priest, and Levite, and people, and the high priest himself, have to succumb to his energetic initiative. The Temple chambers are cleared (chap. xiii. 8, 9); the Levites are fetched back from their fields (ibid. ver. 10); the tithes are collected and brought in (ibid. ver. 12); the strict observance of the sabbath is enforced (ibid. vers. 15–22); the heathen wives are repudiated and cast out (ibid. vers. 3, 23–27); the one stubborn recalcitrant is sent into banishment (ibid. ver. 28). Nehemiah, up to the moment when he disappears from our sight, is still the same unweariedly active, zealous, stirring, striving individual, that he was when first introduced to us. His vitality is as great as ever. "Age has not withered, nor custom staled" him.

Yet, with all his *élan*, his vigour, and his energy, he is prudent. He does not launch out into a world of bitter adversaries without taking every precaution. He accepts a guard from the king (chap. ii. 9) to protect him on his way to Jerusalem. He takes care to have abundant firmans accrediting him to persons of influence (ibid. vers. 7, 8). He knows when to hold his tongue, and keeps his designs secret, until he has obtained a tolerably complete knowledge of the state of affairs (ibid. vers. 12–16), and sees his way clearly to the accomplishment of his purpose. He makes a point of not running any needless risk. The advice of Cromwell to his iron-sides, which has passed into a proverb, was anticipated by Nehemiah, when Sanballat's forces first threatened him—

"Nevertheless," he says, "we made our prayer unto our God, *and set a watch against them day and night*" (chap. iv. 9). In his later dealings with Sanballat, he shows the same caution and circumspection, baffling every effort which is made to entrap him (chap. vi. 2–11). There is also a vein of prudence in the arrangements by which the people are gradually led on to seal, and swear to, the covenant. If we miss any trace of this quality anywhere, it is in his later reformation, when he seems to have felt sure of his ground.

A minor trait in Nehemiah's character is his courage, both physical and moral. His physical courage is strongly marked in the entire account which he gives (chap. iv.) of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. In the position which he occupied, as a civilian and not a professional soldier, and as the governor of a province, not a military commandant, there was no call upon him to expose his person when an attack was threatened, much less to be ever placing himself in the forefront of peril. Nehemiah would have incurred neither blame nor discredit, had he regarded his rightful place as within the city, even inside the fortress,[1] and left the rough work of fighting to "the men of the guard which followed him" (ibid. ver. 21), to his bought slaves, and to such of the population as were accustomed to bear arms and serve in the wars. But he will allow himself no such immunity. He takes his position with the armed force, wherever there seems to be the greatest danger; he marshals the men at his disposal personally (ver. 13); he moves from place to place, and takes his trumpeter with him, to summon aid where it may be most wanted (vers. 18–20); he is there, watching, commanding, encouraging, overseeing, night and day, and scarcely takes off his clothes while the peril continues (ver. 23). Such courage is unusual even in a commander who is a trained soldier; in Nehemiah, the royal favourite, the dainty courtier, the "cup-bearer," it is astonishing.

Nor does his moral courage fall short of his physical. Considerable moral courage was shown, when, notwithstanding that he "was sore afraid" (chap. ii. 2), he made his request for leave of absence of the king (ibid. ver. 5). Still more was exhibited, when to the scornful and spiteful words of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem—"What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?" (ver. 19), he answered, "The God

[1] Neh. ii. 8. Compare above, p. 91.

of heaven, He will prosper us ; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem" (ver. 20). As bold and fearless was the rejoinder, when for the second time the same Sanballat brought forward the same accusation—"There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart" (chap. vi. 8). To beard the high priest within his own stronghold, the Temple, was a most daring and hazardous act (chap. xiii. 7, 8); to banish his grandson, and "chase" him out of the country, required almost as much firmness and resolution (ibid. ver. 28). In enforcing the observance of the sabbath, and dissolving the mixed marriages, and ejecting the heathen wives, perhaps even more moral courage was shown (ibid. vers. 3, 17–22, 25–28), inasmuch as those acts ran counter to a spurious sentimentalism, which had taken a strong hold of some sections of the community.

Nehemiah's unselfishness, liberality, and generous hospitality stand out in strong relief when we compare him with the general run of Oriental governors. For twelve years at least, perhaps for many more, he ruled his province without exacting a farthing of revenue for his own use from those who were under his government. He collected and remitted the royal tribute, but he took nothing for himself, whether in money, or kind (chap. v. 14, 15). He must have supported his court entirely out of his own private means. When we consider what enormous gains governors commonly made under the Persian system,[1] how lavish was their expenditure,[2] and yet what fortunes they accumulated, we cannot but view with astonishment and admiration the one man, who, occupying this position, declines to get any advantage from it, and impoverishes, instea of enriching, himself by his office. Nehemiah entertained daily at his table, during the first twelve years of his government, and probably during the remainder of it (ibid. ver. 17), "one hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers," besides those guests who flocked in from the heathen countries round about. It is a small thing to act the hospitable entertainer, when one can exact whatsoever one pleases from those about one, and store of gold and silver is continually flowing in from one quarter or another, impressing on the happy recipient the sense of

[1] Herod. i. 192.
[2] Xen. "Hell." iv. 1, §. 15; "Cyrop." viii. 6, §§. 11–13.

exhaustless wealth; but it is no small thing, from a private, and therefore limited, fortune, to go on spending day after day enormous sums, not on one's own enjoyments, but on the sustentation of others, for their comfort and benefit. Nehemiah's expenditure was, no doubt, exceeded in amount by that of many a Persian satrap, or even sub-satrap; but such an out-going, without any official in-coming, was unprecedented, and unparalleled.

It has been said, that in the character of Nehemiah it is almost impossible to detect a single fault. But this praise is a little exaggerated. Nehemiah's nature was strongly emotional, and he did not always control his emotions sufficiently. His "fiery soul" was sometimes "roused to burning frenzy." In these fits of passion, he forgot the calmness and dignified behaviour which befits a governor. When with his own hands he tossed the "household stuff" of Tobiah the Ammonite out of the Temple chamber (chap. xiii. 8)—still more, when he "contended" with the Jews who had married foreign wives, and "cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair"—even if he did not do it with his own hands, but only stood by, and saw it done—he acted in a fashion which cannot be regarded as worthy of our approval. He did not hold his passions sufficiently in subjection. To use a modern phrase, he "lost his temper," and that loss rightly involves the loss of a certain amount of our esteem. Further, his feelings themselves are not always rightful feelings. He may "do well to be angry," but he does ill to be vindictive. There is certainly something of vindictiveness in the following outbursts:—"My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear" (chap. vi. 14)—"Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priests and of the Levites" (chap. xiii. 29)—"Hear, O our God, for we are despised, and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders" (chap. iv. 4, 5). It may be said, that such feelings and such expressions of them belong to the time, and that comparatively few Old Testament saints are quite free from them; but this does not prove that they are

not blameworthy. Wherever they occur, they indicate an imperfection in the moral character.

Again, Nehemiah is a little too self-satisfied and self-complacent. Although in the solemn prayer to God with which his work opens, he confesses that he "has sinned against God, both he and his father's house" (chap. i. 6), yet elsewhere, from first to last, he seems unconscious of a fault. He is not ashamed of his bursts of violence—rather he is proud of them. He contrasts with somewhat too evident self-approval his own conduct in his government with that of former governors (chap. v. 15). There is a tinge of Pharisaism in some of his prayers, *e.g.*, "Think upon me, O Lord, for good, according to all that I have done for this people" (chap. v. 19), and "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof" (chap. xiii. 14).

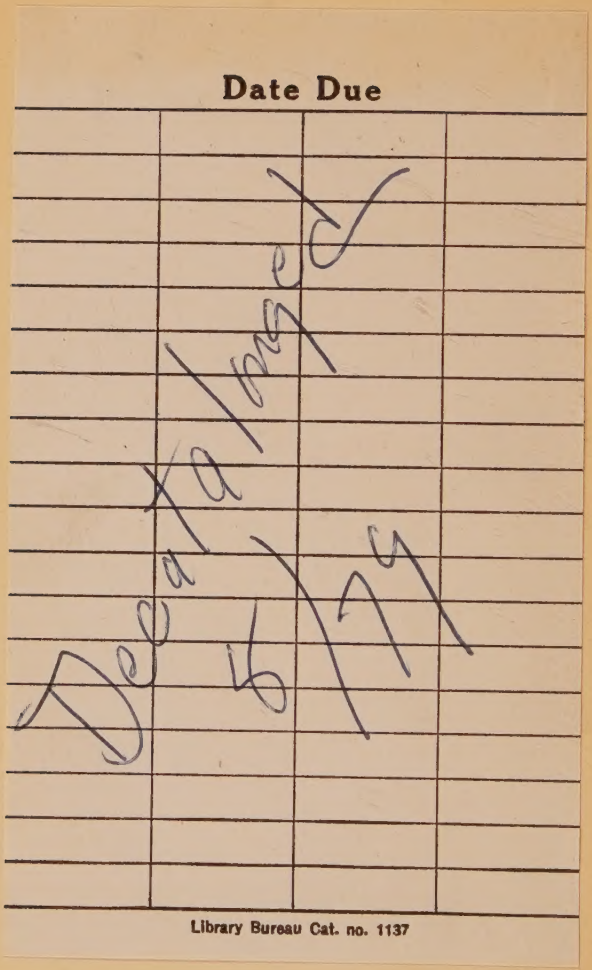
It may be justly said, that these are slight flaws in an otherwise most admirable character; but still they are flaws, and should not be overlooked. We can never too strongly impress, either upon ourselves or others, the fact, that there is but one flawless character in the whole range of history, one perfect pattern and example, the man Christ Jesus.

The work of Nehemiah was twofold, physically to raise up Jerusalem from the ruin and depression in which she lay, and morally, together with Ezra, to raise up, re-animate, and re-invigorate, the Jewish nation. It was the first of these works which his countrymen especially ascribed to him. Alike in the writings of the Son of Sirach, and in those of the great Jewish historian and archæologist, Josephus, his great praise is that he "raised up the walls," and left them as an eternal monument of himself. This work, being his and his alone, both in conception and in execution, remained attached to his name, when the part which he had taken in the Reformation, ordinarily ascribed to Ezra, was forgotten. And yet his part in that other work was no small one. Ezra's zeal was great, and his power to sway the people's minds and feelings by his strong emotions and passionate eloquence very considerable; but he lacked the means of permanently impressing them. It was Nehemiah's practical energy and strong firm will that imposed upon the people the observances, from which they would willingly have shaken themselves free, and made the Mosaic code the law

of the nation. It must have been Nehemiah's authority as Governor which carried out Ezra's conceptions, gave them form and substance, and put them on an enduring footing. The active worker is as essential to the success of any scheme as the speculative contriver, and the great Reform of Religion under Ezra and Nehemiah must be ascribed at least as much to the latter as to the former.

The reform itself may be summed up in a few words. "A new period in the history of Israel's religion begins with Ezra and Nehemiah. . . The characteristic of this phase in the development of the religion lies in this, that it starts from the revealed will of Jehovah, the Law, acknowledges it as the rule of its faith and life, and refers everything to it. From the nature of the case, the two reformers could do no more than found"—or rather, re-found—"Judaism. The ideal which was before their eyes was not capable of being realized in a day. But they laid the foundations, and laid them in such a way that, as history teaches us, men could build on regularly after their design."[1] The later Israel, the Israel of the times of the Maccabees, and of our Lord's day, was the natural fruit and outcome of their exertions. Without them it is almost certain that the wall of partition between Israel and the heathen, which was absolutely indispensable under the circumstances, as even Kuenen admits,[2] would have been broken down, and the small Jewish nation would have lost itself among its neighbours, and have vanished without leaving a trace behind.

[1] Kuenen, "Religion of Israel," vol. ii. p. 249. [2] Ibid. p. 242.



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